



accting

AdvanCing behavioural
Change Through
an INclusive Green deal

Narratives on inequalities in enablers and hindrances for behavioural change in Europe - ACCTING Dataset

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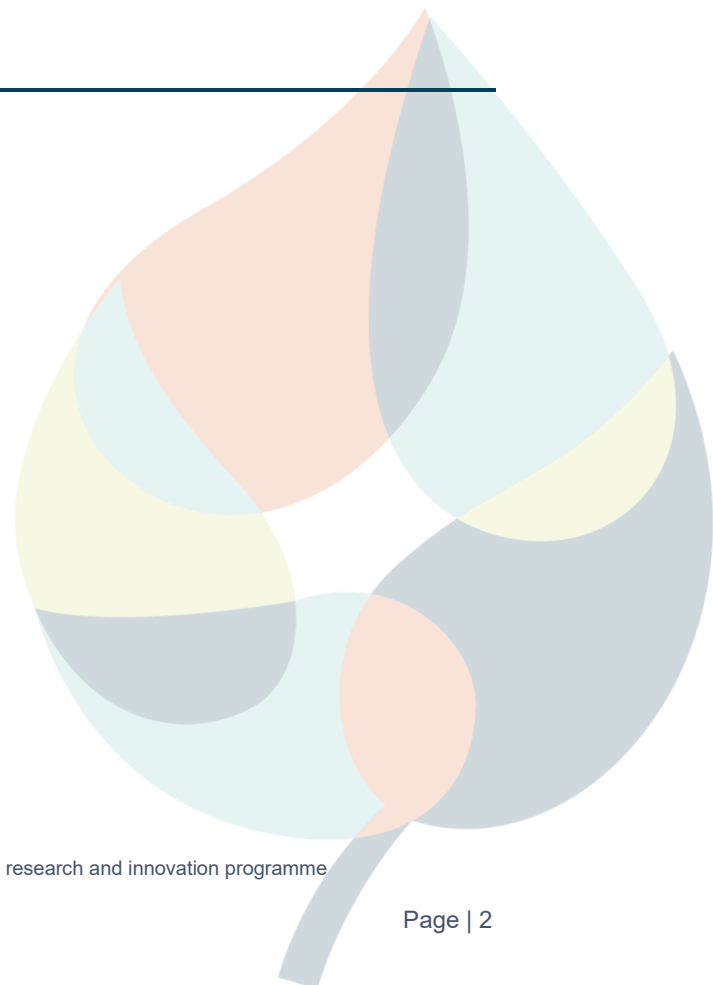


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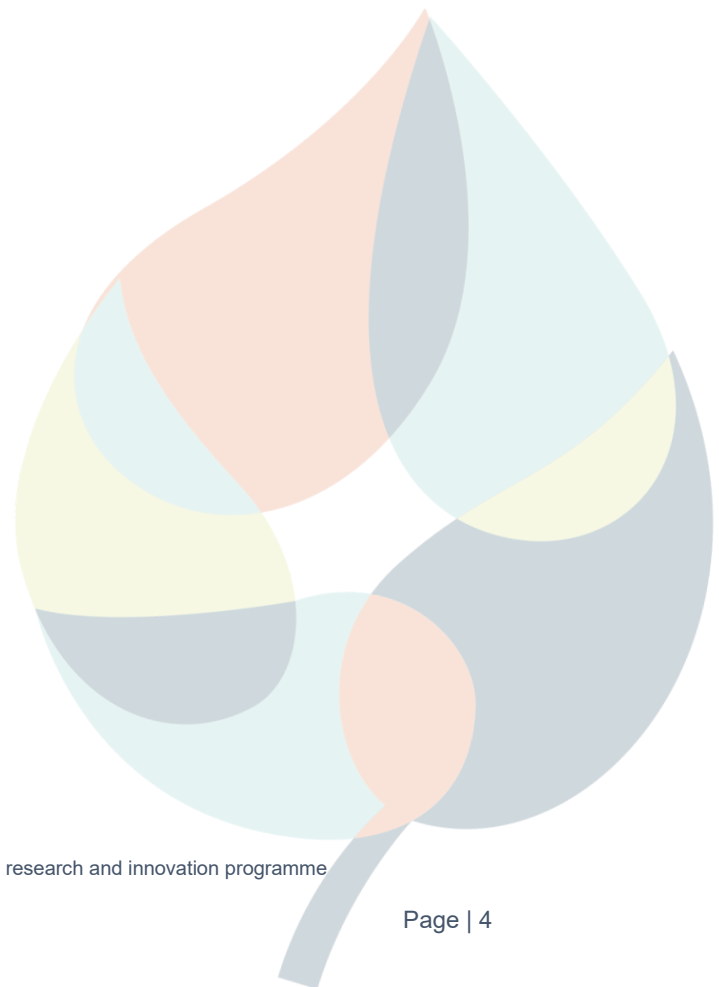
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Research Lines / Green Deal policy areas

RL	GD area	RL thematic area
RL1	Climate action	Valorising local knowledge in the frame of the community-based disasters' management and mitigating exposure
RL2	Biodiversity	Biodiversity and land use restrictions
RL3	Clean energy	Energy communities, energy poverty and community energy schemes
RL4	Clean energy	Energy-efficiency and pro-environmental measures in micro/small enterprises
RL5	Farm to fork	Improving food security and healthy diets in vulnerable communities, through local production, informed consumption practices and circularity
RL6	Farm to fork	Values associated with Environmentally Sustainable Food consumption (ESFC) as a function of age, gender, vulnerability to the Green Deal and country/culture
RL7	Sustainable mobility	Transport poverty and sustainable travel: families in socially vulnerable areas
RL8	Sustainability	Post-lockdown sustainable mobilities: centring cycling and walking



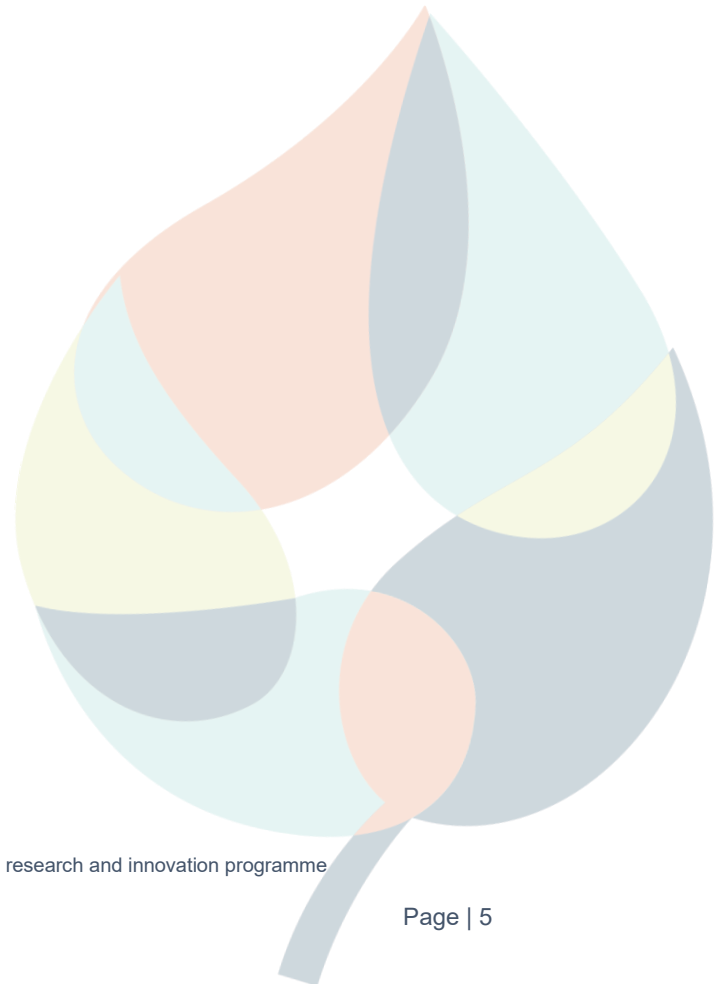
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The ACCTING project

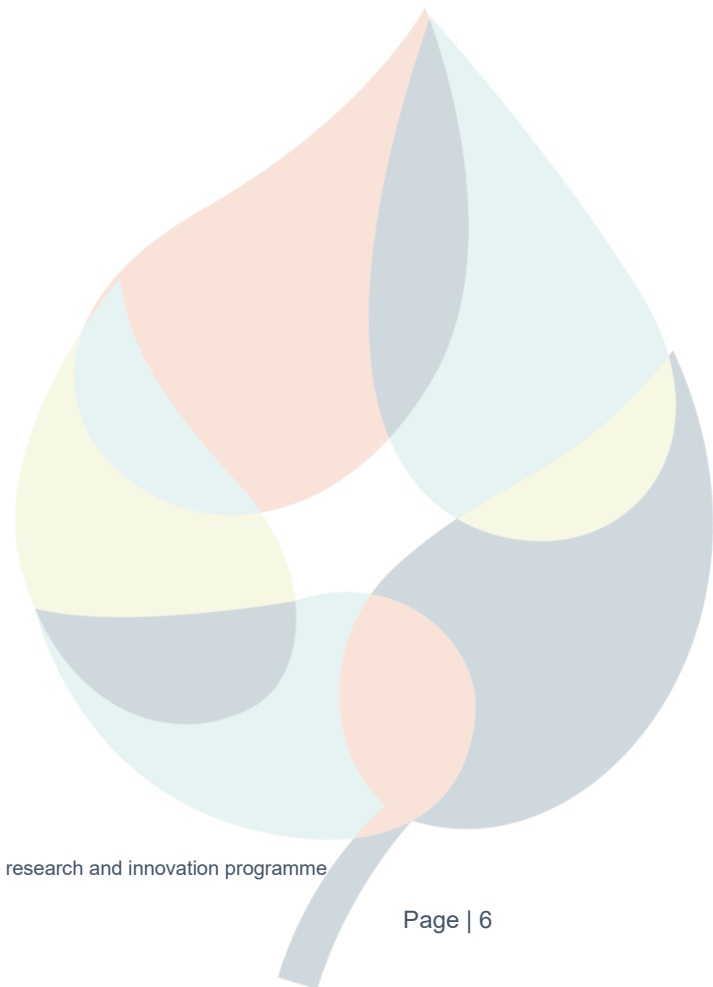
It is acknowledged by now that the global climate crisis is not only an ecological crisis but also an economic, social and political crisis, with devastating effects on individuals and societies. These negative effects are not evenly distributed within societies. It is the poorer, marginalised and vulnerable groups who are the most acutely affected, exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities.

The European Green Deal foresees efficient use of resources for a circular and clean economy. However, inequalities emerge in the context of its policy and interventions.

The EU-funded ACCTING project takes these considerations as a starting point for a complex series of research and experimental activities aimed at identifying, analysing and testing policies and initiatives capable of responding to this crisis, mitigating its effects on the most vulnerable and helping them play a significant role in the pursuit of greater environmental sustainability.

The project mobilises research experimentation and innovation to promote an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal focusing on the inequalities produced by its policies and supporting behavioural change at individual and collective levels.

The project explores the impact of Green Deal policy initiatives on individual and collective behaviours, provides evidence, and empowers policymakers and stakeholders to anticipate policy responses and potential negative influences, and mitigate such impacts in decision-making. ACCTING collects new data on Green Deal policy interventions and co-designs and implements pilot actions to reduce or prevent policy-related inequalities and advance behavioural change for an inclusive and equal European Green Deal.



Project Consortium

 <p>SCIENCE CONNECT YOUR PARTNER IN SCIENCE</p>	European Science Foundation (ESF)
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 <p>NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology</p>	Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)
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Summary

The impact of climate change and the capacity to mitigate its negative impacts are unevenly distributed across and within societies; it is the poorer, marginalised and vulnerable groups who are the most acutely affected. This dataset captures some of the experiences of those groups. It includes 358 narratives collected via individual narrative interviews in 13 countries during June-December 2022 across eight thematic research lines – each research line addressing an EU Green Deal policy area.

ACCTING aims to produce knowledge and innovations from a gender+ intersectional perspective to advance behavioural change at individual and collective levels, and in related social practices and policies, for an inclusive and equal European Green Deal. The project addresses two overall research questions:

- (1) What factors enable or hinder individual, collective and organisational behaviours, and related social practices, to achieve a gender equal and socially just environmental transition across different Green Deal policy areas?
- (2) How are these factors same/different for various (vulnerable) groups, also considering intersectional dynamics?

The research is conducted in eight parallel Research Lines (RLs) and through two sequential research cycles. The RLs include: Valorising local knowledge in the frame of the community-based disasters' management and mitigating exposure (RL1), Biodiversity and land use restrictions (RL2), Energy communities, energy poverty and community energy schemes (RL3), Energy-efficiency and pro-environmental measures in micro/small enterprises (RL4), Improving food security and healthy diets in vulnerable communities, through local production, informed consumption practices and circularity (RL5), Values associated with Environmentally Sustainable Food consumption (ESFC) as a function of age, gender, vulnerability to the Green Deal and country/culture (RL6), Transport poverty and sustainable travel: families in socially vulnerable areas (RL7), Post-lockdown sustainable mobilities: centring cycling and walking (RL8).

Each RL is made up of four-six country-level studies, which comprise the research conducted in ACCTING Work Package (WP) 3 (Zorell & Strid, 2023). These build upon a mapping of bottom-up initiatives in 34 countries (WP2) (Carnevale et al., 2023), and in turn contribute to the Open Studios (WP4) (Kerremans & Denis, 2023) where research insights are translated into directions for solutions in a co-creative, participatory way, and to pilot actions, operational recommendations, and a new research agenda (WP5) (Sharma et al., 2023). In the first research cycle, 401 narratives were produced using a coordinated and consistent methodology and analysed through common reporting procedures.

The coordinated methodology of interviewing, analysis and reporting of the narratives allowed for harmonised, efficient, and cost-effective data collection. Guidelines and reporting templates were provided to enable coherent, purposeful, and useful reporting of results. Online training sessions and seminars on the guidelines, on the narrative technique and their theoretical and methodological foundation, were organised. The work was supported by bilateral meetings with research lines and research line leaders. The entire process was undertaken as co-creation by the partners, including recurrent meetings to discuss, develop, and provide helpdesks for the selection, recruitment, interviewing,

analysis, and reporting of the narratives. Some of the original narratives have been edited to remove sensitive data and protect the informants, others have been omitted from this publicly available dataset for the same reason of overriding ethical concern.

The narrative interview method

Narrative interviewing is a method to articulate and share people's stories. Narrative interviews are used to understand how experiences of past events and circumstances can improve collective planning and policy for the future (Kim, 2019). It involves inviting participants to tell their own stories and experiences in their own words. The technique is used to collect and share a person's story, which entails both a research methodology and mechanism for storytelling, i.e. both a way of telling a story, and a way of knowing. Narratives as a technique can make visible how multiple sources of inequalities intersect, as well as the situational and contextual nature of inequalities from a single person's perspective.

The narrative interviews in ACCTING started with an open-ended request for an experience to be shared. The researcher listened actively, paraphrased back to ensure understanding, and asked clarifying questions if needed (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Hence, in contrast to the structured or semi-structured interview, the narrative interview does not follow a question-answer format. Instead, it entails a conceptual shift away from the idea that informants have answers to questions posed by an interviewer, and towards the idea that informants are narrators that have stories to tell and their own voices to tell them with (Kim, 2019; Chase, 2005). What is important for the researcher is to be open to the informant's experience; to employ an open mindset and see the story from the informant's point of view.

Recruitment

Informants were recruited via existing networks and contacts – some established during preceding research tasks in the project – and snowballing, and by native speaking researchers, using purposive sampling. Each researcher was asked to recruit informants with diverse lived experiences through a sample of diverse inequalities and identities, thus reflecting the gender+ approach of ACCTING.

The recruitment of individuals for the narratives was purposive, that is, strategic and targeted (Campbell et al., 2020), with the aim of collecting diverse experiences and highlighting the intersection of inequalities and identities, thus reflecting the gender+ approach of ACCTING. Purposive sampling relies on researchers' judgment to select informants whose experiences and stories can speak to the impact of the Green Deal on vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Informants were recruited from both *socially included vulnerable groups* and *marginalised/disadvantaged vulnerable groups*. Importantly, vulnerable groups were not considered only as socially excluded/marginalised/disadvantaged victims negatively affected by Green Deal dynamics; but also, as 'key agents of change' (i.e., as people who can drive and affect transformative change, and need to be empowered through policies and practices of inclusion. Informants are individuals with direct experiences of vulnerability,

marginalisation and disadvantage – not representatives of such groups or people with professional experiences.

Analysis and reporting

Following each interview, researchers completed a report on the informant and the narrative that they shared, using a spreadsheet template. The report was designed to preserve the informant narratives while simultaneously exposing the analytical hooks that allowed the ACCTING research objectives to be obtained more effectively. Each report contained three sections: background information, narrative summary and analysis, enabling and hindering factors.

The first section, background information to the narrative interview covered the ACCTING context, the interview context, and informant information. This included case code in the format RLX_YYZZ, where X is the research line number, YY a two-letter country code, and ZZ a two-digit interview code (e.g., RL1_IT01); the research line and an option to indicate further RLs for which the narrative could be interesting; case study information (country, location); name and team of the interviewer; and the place, date, and duration of the interview. It also included the pseudonym, age, and vulnerability profile of the informant. To identify which vulnerable group the informant is considered to be a representative of and the informant's vulnerability profile, several tick-boxes were provided. The aim is to systematically capture the vulnerabilities and any significant intersections that were the basis for the informant's inclusion in the research.

The second section, the narrative summary, consisted of a headline that captures the essence of the narrative, a brief retelling of the narrative (circa 1000 words), a few specifically telling quotes, and 5-10 keywords that capture the narrative. Quotes were carefully translated into English to emphasise their meaning or essence (rather than precise wording). The story was written in first person singular, i.e., using "I", and constructed using relevant elements from the interview to give an explanation of the main events and actions described, and their causes and consequences as understood by the informant.

In a third and final section, the interviewer was asked to identify enabling and hindering factors across three thematic dimensions: resources, social dynamics, and structural conditions. The interviewer was asked to identify and to elaborate on if and how single factors are mentioned in the interview as obstacles or drivers of change, or as both of the two. Furthermore, interviewers were encouraged to elaborate upon significant relationships between factors, to tease out insights important for the later analysis.

At the end, interviewers had opportunity to add a short reflection on why they wrote the narrative in the way they did, on the recruitment process, or any other information they think is important to share.

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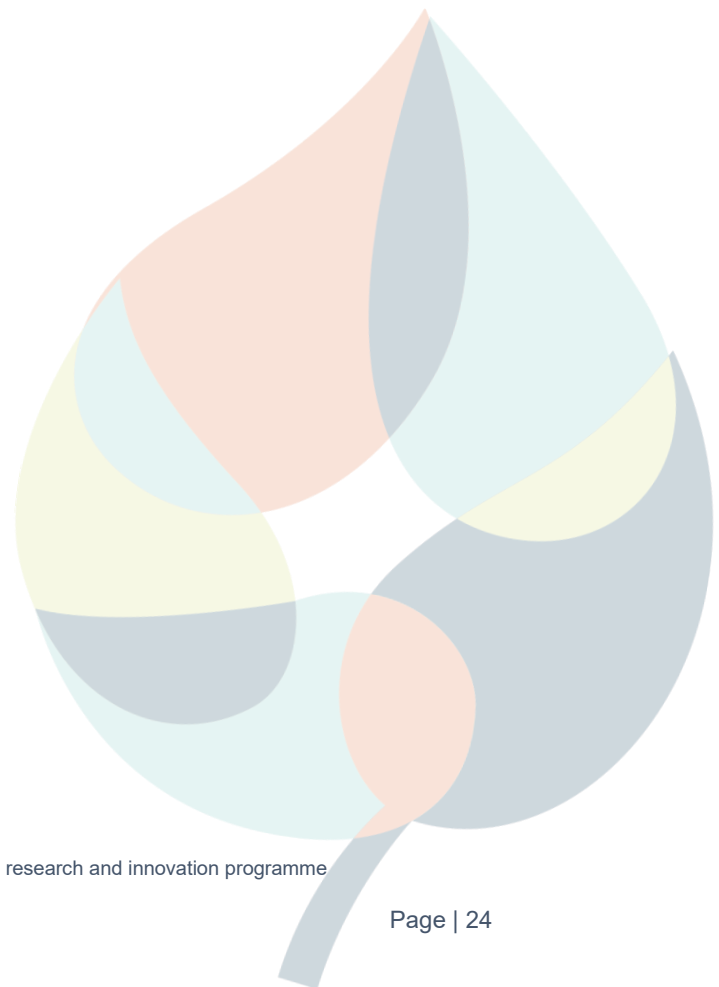
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Narratives by Research Line



Research Line 1: Valorising local knowledge

RL1_SE01, Sweden, Changes in weather make hunting more difficult

Narrative

I am a man who is 74 years old. I live in the north of Sweden. I live in a semi-large community. I have two grown up daughters and a grandchild. I am retired now but used to have an academic profession and worked for many years in a cultural institution. To some extent, I am still active in my field. Before retiring, I had a manager's position. My family comes from the north of Sweden, but I was actually born in the southern parts of Sweden, where my parents worked for a large industry for a few years. They moved back north when I was just a couple of months of age. I am a hunter and I spend a lot of time in nature. In the summertime, I often spend days in a row out in the forest, camping under the skies. I also have a cottage that I visit a lot.

This is the old home of my maternal grandparents.

When I am at the cottage I hunt, fish, and pick berries. I have been walking this land for more than 50 years and know it well. In later years I have seen drastic changes in the natural surroundings. For instance, there is a place at the rim of a mire where I usually sit and scout for moose. It is so easy to see the moose there. But in later years this place is of no use. The mire has turned into a forest! It is now impossible to see anything from that specific place.

I find it more difficult to hunt for forest birds these days. They are behaving different because of the changing weather. It is difficult to foresee where they will be, looking for food. This is true before the snow comes, but also when there is snow on the ground. Because there is often much more snow now, or snow that melts because of mild weather and then freezes again, creating an ice layer, it is trickier to track them in the snow. The warmer weather means that the birds have more food, but it is harder to know where they are. My knowledge does not work anymore! There is less grouse (Swe: ripa), but more black grouse (Swe: orre). It is like the climate zones are moving north. The only thing that has improved is fishing. There are more fish in the lakes. Not new species, but more fish.

Another example of the changes I experience is that sinks/sinkholes (Swe: sänkor) is getting wetter. What used to be dry lands are getting more and more moist which means that there is much more moss than there used to be. One of my daughters built a little troll out of bracket fungi (Swe: tickor) close to our cottage. This must have been about 20 years ago. A couple of years ago when I was there, I found that the troll was missing! I first thought that someone had stolen it. But looking closer I saw that the troll was

overgrown by moss! So, the moss is spreading quickly and also makes it difficult to walk in the forest. Where there was dry ground before, there is now full of slippery moss.

Another thing that stands out to me as different is that the periods of warm weather in the summer are more intensive and they last longer than they used to. But some years it is also extremely cold. It is like the extremes are becoming more common. Before, the changes were slow, but it is more drastic now. It makes me feel sad that the lands are changing.

The summer of 2018 was an extremely hot and dry summer. In my community there were wildfires in the forests. You could smell the smoke. A lot of volunteers helped to fight the fires. I am a bit too old to be fighting the fires “at the front”, but I volunteered to serve the firefighters food. Afterwards, us volunteers were given a monetary compensation by the municipality, and this was a nice surprise! I also think that the municipality is more prepared now for natural disasters, such as forest fires, than they were before 2018.

I see the changes in nature, I reflect upon it, and I am worried. But in the local community, most people do not commonly discuss this. It seems to me that most people think that things are the way they have always been. They use their cars and snowmobiles like they have always done. I guess the changes are not obvious to the regular local person. You do not find many “preppers” here. I don’t think people are worried. Most of us have the freezers full of meat or we can go out in the forest and get some if we need to. People living in larger cities or communities are more vulnerable in that way, than we are here.

For my reindeer herding friends however, the changes are obvious, and they are worried. Each year is a disaster for reindeer herders and reindeer! Because the snow is coming late and then there are periods of warm weather (even rain) mixed with cold periods, creating an ice crust over the reindeer pastures, it is impossible to let the reindeer roam freely nowadays. Most reindeer herders are forced to keep the reindeer fenced in during winter and feed them fodder. The animals starve to death if they are let loose on the mountains.

I find that it also affects the quality of the reindeer meat. I find that meat from local animals is tasteless these days. I guess because they eat the same thing as cows and get really stressed when they are fenced in! I must admit that I have myself been a firm climate change denier! I listened to research that saw the changing climate as natural fluctuations. However, when witnessing the melting of glacier snow through excursions I have been part of, I have been convinced that we are in the middle of a climate crisis brought on by human behaviour.

I do not think that we as individuals can do a lot when it comes to stopping the development. This is a global problem. If Sweden would stop emissions all together, it would still not be noticeable in the greater scheme of things. This must be dealt with on an international level. But the infrastructure in society is not built to deal with this.

I worry for the future. It seems like we on a global level will miss the two degrees target. We might move towards three degrees. And for us up here in the arctic this means around six degrees in practice. It will mean warmer summers with more forest fires. There are hydroelectric power stations around here that are not built to stand for increased water pressure, something that might happen if the weather is getting warmer. In the community we have received information from the municipality on how we are to act in case a dam breaks.

I am out a lot in nature and being old I see things from a long perspective. I reflect on things. It scares me that if the amount of water level in the sea rises so that the gulf stream stops, we will go from having extremely hot summers up here, to having a virtual ice age from one day to the other.

Quotes

It's sad that the lands change. And we can do very little ourselves. After all, it is a global problem. Even if we reduce all emissions to zero in Sweden, it will not be noticeable globally. So, it's a huge problem.

I've been out in nature a lot, so I have a good understanding of what's going on. And I tend to reflect on what I see. And I have long perspectives. I have been visiting my lands for more than 50 years and I have always thought that it looks pretty much the same. But the last few years it doesn't anymore.

Keywords

Changing weather, hunting, local knowledge, change in fauna, reindeer herding

RL1_SE02, Sweden, Local food entrepreneur experiencing that nature is stressed

Narrative

I am a 58-year-old woman. I live in the north of Sweden, and I have lived here for 35 years. I am born in a large city in the south of Sweden. I have grown up children. I married a reindeer herder, but we are divorced, and I live with a new man now. I came to the North in my 20s. I worked at a few tourist stations in the mountains. I felt that this was my place. About 12 years ago I took a course in Sámi traditional food and cooking and now own my own business that focus on herbs (for cooking and medicine). I give courses and am also involved in some touristic enterprises. With my background I become a good negotiation between tourists and the life here in the North. I have one leg in the urban, southern life and one leg in the Sámi, rural life. I feel I am the right person to contribute with knowledge about our life here.

Part of my job is to collect herbs and berries, and I usually spend a lot of time out in the nature from April to September. There are foremost two things that I have noticed in

the nature that indicates climate change and change in weather conditions. Firstly, the autumns are longer, and winter comes late. Also, winters are milder. It is almost never -35 in the winters nowadays. Something that used to be common. The other thing that I have noticed, and this is during the last three years or so, is that there are so many berries, and the flowers are abundant. Some people will think that this is wonderful! But to me this is a clear sign that the plants are stressed. It's like they want to release as much energy as they can (produce seedlings) before they die. It feels wrong. It feels like the plants know that there is a catastrophe coming.

With the warmer climate we see new species. There are new green plants, like the Cherry bowl (Swe: kirskål) and the Cow parsnip (Swe: björnloka). We also see roedeer (Swe: rådjur) now. Some of the people in my community seem to think it's nice that the summers are getting warmer, and they don't see the problems. But I think it is important to see things in a longer perspective.

Through my reindeer herding ex-husband, I have some insight in that society. The weather now is not compatible with reindeer herding as we know it. The wet autumns and unstable winters often create an ice layer over the grass and lichens. This means that the reindeer has now chance of digging through the snow to graze in the winters. Both reindeer and other grazing animals starve. Reindeer herders try to adapt by fencing in the reindeer and give them fodder during winters. There is also a risk that reindeer forget the knowledge of retrieving food on their own. And there are other things that makes reindeer herding life difficult that adds to the problems. Large number of predators, intensified forestry, etc. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find areas for the reindeer. This results in, for instance, having to move reindeer with trucks. This takes a lot of time and money. But the reindeer herding society do not have resources to hire lobbyists, and the politicians are ignorant about it.

I feel sad that the winters are warmer. I have loved the cold winters here, now it's like the south of Sweden. I also feel worried. What about if the gulf stream changes! Then it could quickly become much colder here. It is scary to think that it is us humans that are to blame. We are stupid, but there is also wisdom among us. Today money and egoism are running the world. I think it needs to become much, much worse before people come together and really do something about it. I do not think we can turn things around before all hell breaks loose, and we should be glad that we have lived such comfortable lives so far.

I think one thing that hinders positive change is that knowledge is being used in the wrong way. With that I mean that it is possible to find arguments that support different perspectives. It becomes difficult to know who is wrong and who is right.

It is also very complex. It is like the green transition. They say we need more mines to get minerals for the green transitions. But mining is a dirty business! I feel like it is very quiet around those processes connected to the green transitions, that in themselves are not so very green. Business involved in green transitions also want the best return. It becomes "big business", and as soon as something becomes big business, they lose track of the more moral principles. We need more electricity to phase out fossil fuels. But where should all the electricity come from? I am hesitant towards nuclear power. It'd dangerous. I am also hesitant towards wind turbines. They cost a lot and are not good for birds. Personally, I think solar power is what we should develop more. I also believe in more small-scale electric power stations; that electricity is produced more locally.

I sometimes feel that there is a huge contrast between what I try to do as an individual and what is happening on a regional or international level. I try to recycle my garbage, for instance. But then I hear that the municipality is combusting everything together anyway. Supposedly, they don't have the means or the infrastructure to recycle our recycled garbage in the right way anyway! It is easy to become cynical. I think a lot of us is fighting over a constant bad conscience because we don't do enough, and we are running out of time to do anything about climate change. Every choice is difficult, and this creates an insecurity.

I think politicians, both on a national and an international arena listen to lobbyists more than anything. So, the knowledge that they gain comes from these groups. But there are other types of perspectives and insights, coming from groups in society without resources, that never reach the politicians.

I would like to see more experimental studies in the world on how to improve resources and energy savings to measure what would work. This way we could inspire and teach each other. Also, more transdisciplinary research is needed.

With the changing weather, there is more rain and more melting water in the spring. There is a discussion in the community about the durability of the dams. They need repairing and an accident could easily happen. We have also had forest fires during hot summers. The modern forest industry is partly to blame here as they use large machines that can create sparks that could start fires. Also, they only plant coniferous forests (Swe: barrskog) that is the perfect material for fires. A mixed forest with leafy trees is better.

In my job, I talk a lot about sustainability. I also try to give customers an alternative view of the forest and of nature and talk about how there is more than monetary values in a forest. It is important that people have a personal connection with the environment. If you know your area, you do not want to hurt it but look after it. It is important that we do not alienate from nature. To enable a more sustainable way, I think that it is important to foster knowledge and connection with your environment. There should be courses on how to care for the local environment! To me, the largest obstacle to change things around, is that people don't bother. A lot of species are dying, but people don't feel that it is affecting them. It is easy to become paralyzed. But I think we can change. If really needed, we could change our behaviour. The pandemic has taught us that. But until we sit there without electricity or water, we will probably not react.

Quotes

I have felt that for the past three years there have been a lot of flowers and a lot of berries. And for me, that is a sign that the plants are stressed. They want to produce as many berries and flowers as possible to be able to seed off. For me, there is a strong feeling that nature knows that there is something wrong and now it is important to produce as much as possible before a disaster hits.

If you know your area, you do not want to harm it.

Keywords



Foraging, changing weather, nature, green transition, reindeer herding, plant knowledge, recycling, economy

RL1_SE03, Sweden, Britta blocks her emotions and believes we need a major shift in living

Narrative

I am a 50-year-old woman. I live in a community in the north of Sweden. I am Sámi and was brought up in a reindeer herding family and still live in a reindeer herding family. I work in the cultural sector.

I am spending a lot of time in the mountains and in nature in general. One thing I have noticed concerning the weather conditions is that it is much windier, especially during winter. This is a change I have seen within the last ten years or so. There is a significant difference. Also, there is much more ice on the ground now. It is even difficult at times to walk on the pavements here in the community! The autumns are getting longer and when winter comes it is more likely to be warmer periods during winter, even with rain. The changing weather has affected the reindeer herding negatively. So far, this winter has been quite normal, so this might actually be a good winter for the reindeer. We'll see.

Another thing that I have noticed is that there is more water in rivers and lakes during springtime. The summer comes late and fast and all snow melt at once. The water levels become high, and this effects fishing. It's much harder to catch fish if there is a lot of water.

The weather is different than it used to be, and this is a common theme when people talk in the community. It is the extremes that we see more frequently. It seems to be really hot or really cold and we have seen some super-hot summers lately.

I worry, but some people seem to just think of their own situation. Some say that it so nice with the heat and that it is a bonus if there is less snow, so they don't have to shovel snow.

I hesitate to talk to my children about this. They have enough to worry about in the times that we live in. To talk about the weather and climate change might just add anxiety.

I think the only way to turn the ship around and to do something about this situation is to somehow create a major shift in the way people live. I think we need to go back and live like we did in the 1950s. Then we had a sufficient life without using too many resources. But I guess no one is prepared to make those changes. But it is not sustainable to consume the way we do today. Just imagine how many unnecessary things we have today, like heated towel rails and floor heating. Who needs that? And if I go to

the store to buy a new toothbrush, there are like 50 to choose from! We don't need that excessively large range of things to choose from.

I do think that some kind of political means of control from both a national and international arena is necessary to trigger change. For instance, we should have some kind of system where you were only allowed a certain number of flights per person! But it is really about changing the mindset of everyone in the whole world. The latest COP-meeting in Egypt makes you think, though. Supposedly delegates were flying in with their own private jets, to a meeting about to save the world from a climate catastrophe! Technical solutions might help. But the main thing for me is to realise that we must save resources and electricity. We must start to think about what we need to survive and stop using unnecessary things.

With my background, I carry a knowledge of how to survive, and live well, without running water and electricity. I have learnt from childhood how to bake bread and food over an open fire. It feels safe to have that knowledge to fall back on in case we need to go back to that sort of life again. I guess that if you are from a large city, you don't have that knowledge.

It is popular with "prepping" right now. I guess this is the way to think about how to survive a crisis from an urban perspective and I find it fascinating to learn about how they think. In a way we are "prepping" here too, even though we don't call it that. Most of us here have the freezer full of berries and meat.

I think more general education to people on how to survive a catastrophe would be valuable. Some kind of public education on how to get by without a convenient store around the corner. To learn how to make a fire and purify water. And how to be economic with food! For instance, if you only have a small amount of meat, it is better to make a soup and mix it with other ingredients to make it last.

I feel I have to block some of the emotions and worries, otherwise I would get too depressed. I truly feel that if we are to fix this, we must go back in time.

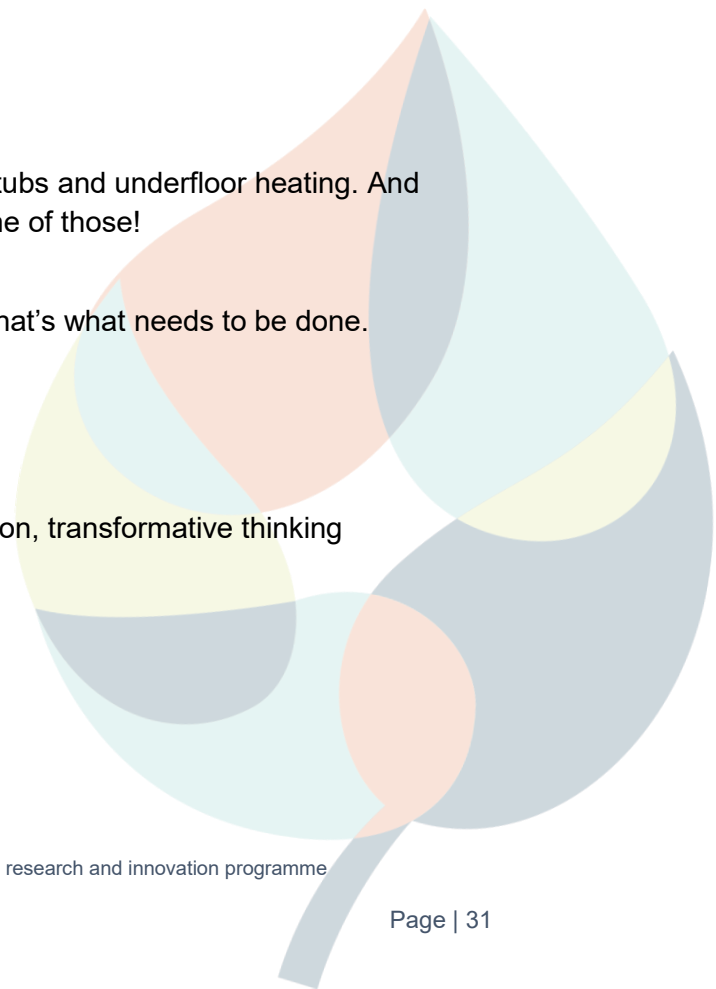
Quotes

Maybe it is not a human right to have pools and hot tubs and underfloor heating. And towel warmers [...] what on earth would you need one of those!

It's about changing the mindset of an entire world. That's what needs to be done.

Keywords

Changing weather, local knowledge, over consumption, transformative thinking



RL1_SE04, Sweden, Kristina is sad that lands have been lost to mining

Narrative

I am a woman in my mid-50s. I live in a smaller community in the north of Sweden. I live in a house in the centre of the community together with my husband, children, and my dog. I was born in this community and have a large extended family here.

I come from a Sami (reindeer herding) background, and I spend a lot of time in the mountains.

I see the weather changing around us. Especially, it has become windier. It is always windy nowadays, all year around, both in the mountains and down here in the community. This is affecting my family. Our hoses, buildings and boats up in the mountains are destroyed by the wind. It costs a lot of money to repair it. It is also dangerous. It is impossible sometimes to get out on the lake to fish and just to be outside. In the winter, I cannot drive the snowmobile if it's too windy. I would risk getting lost in the snow or simply blow of the machine. The wind creates a lot of worry. The old people in the family think it's very unpleasant and scary. The wind is so strong at times that it is at the risk of one's own life that you spend times in the mountains. A roof may blow down and hit you! You have to watch the weather forecasts all the time now to see how windy it will be. It used to be the cold that was the main thing to look out for, but now it is the wind.

Sometimes in the summer we are at a location in the mountains where we don't get Wi-Fi connection. There is no radio contact either. Then it's difficult to check the weather forecast and you try to watch the sky to predict how windy it will be. What I usually do is to check the forecast before we go and hope that it won't change too much. It would be good if we at least would get the radio to work when we are there.

I don't know so much about what is being done about the climate change from an international perspective. For instance, I have not followed what has happened at the cop-meeting in Egypt. But here in our region there is a lot of green transition happening. However, for us this means more mines. Mining, forestry and hydroelectric power plants are affecting us the most when it comes to the green transition.

I am against mining exploration. It takes away our lands. But it is really difficult to have a say on the issue for regular citizens. The free market is ruling the game and the big companies do not invite citizens to participate in deliberations. There is no platform where you can talk about this. Maybe the Sami Parliament could stand up for us, but they do not have a strong voice here, either. Only the companies are heard, and it is their needs that is put first. The focus is on bringing in jobs to the community and on how to accommodate everyone. My children don't talk so much about climate change, but they worry about finding a place to stay when they leave home, and that they can afford. With the development of green infrastructure and people moving here, finding a place to stay will be difficult. However, my children have expressed that they will never work in a mine! In the community, people talk about the changing weather, but not about the development of green infrastructure. Right now, the politicians in charge in the municipality is mining-friendly, so it is a bit sensitive.

We (reindeer herding community) lost a lot of lands when the dams (hydroelectric power plants) were developed. If there will be a mine here, more land will be lost. There will also be more transportation and heavy traffic going to and from the mining area. Already now, the traffic from mines in the next parish is a huge problem. They pass not far from our community, and it constitutes a major traffic hazard. So having more heavy traffic, would be scary.

It is emotionally hard to see the land disappear. I see, for instance, that the forests are diminishing. Every time a drive through a certain area, there are less and less forest. It feels sad.

Quotes

It's windy all year round. And there's a lot more wind. And it's windy all the time.

We feel that it is the market that controls everything, and that it is the companies that run everything. No other side is heard.

We see all the bad things that the company Vattenfall has done, and how it has affected us. It is easy to imagine that the establishment of a mine would follow the same route and affect us as negatively as hydroelectric power plants have.

Keywords

Wind, warmer weather, green transition, mining, market orientation.

RL1_SE05, Sweden, Elderly woman worried about fossil fuels

Narrative

I am a woman of 73. I live in the north of Sweden in a small village, but rather close to a city. During my upbringing the family moved a lot, and I have been living in a lot of different places throughout Sweden. I could fit in anywhere! I am retired now but have worked as a natural scientist. I have a husband and two grown up children.

I have always been interested in flora and fauna. I have spent a lot of time in nature, and I used to pick berries every summer, but I cannot do that any longer due to a bad back.

I the last couple of years I have noticed changes in nature. There are fewer berries. Also, a strange thing is that in the summer there are much more leaves on the trees.

There is more foliage, and the forest seems denser. It might be because we have more rain now than we used to have.

My husband fish a lot. He has not noticed any differences in the number of fish, but we often say that the trout (Swe: röding) will probably decline as the water gets warmer with climate change.

Another change in fauna is that we often have roedeer (Swe: 'rådjur') here now. They are so cute and nice, and my husband and I feed them. After a while they will get quite tame.

I often wonder how the small animals, like small rodents will make it when there not often a warming layer of snow anymore during winter. This will have an effect on other animals too, like foxes and predatory birds.

In a way the changes in nature do not really affect me that much. In my family we try to do our bit. We have an ethanol car and try to use it as little as possible. We try to go to the city and shop only once a week. We don't fly anymore. We also try to use as little electricity as possible. We have however thought of getting an electric car, but it is just too expensive.

Where we live there is only public transport during summer, and then the bus only comes once a day. It used to be more buses, but they cut back on it. I guess because there were just too few passengers. For people it is more comfortable to take the car to the city anyway. And it is so crazy that taking the train to go to Stockholm, for instance, will cost you so much more than flying! In my opinion, it is a good thing that the prices on gas and diesel are so high. I do not think it is smart of politicians to try to lower the prices right now. We have a climate crisis, and it is positive that people get incentives not to use their cars so much. Around the village here, I don't think people are so aware. People tend to think about themselves first. They are often a bit lazy and use the snowmobiles or cars just to go short distances. In general, I think I am more aware and concerned than most people. Of course, reindeer herders around here are badly affected by the changing weather. My family own a couple of reindeer and we have to feed them every winter. They are not able to find food for themselves.

It is a shame that Greta Thunberg did not come earlier. We would have needed the awakening earlier. But the changes in nature due to climate change and dirty emissions from industry come gradually, and it is therefore easy to not see them.

I have been thinking about the green production of electricity. It takes a lot of electricity to try to make fossil free steel, for instance. But how can we produce the amount of electricity that is needed? I like the thought of solar panels but am not sure how well it would work up here in the North. I am not keen on Nuclear Power. It seems a bit old fashioned. And I do not feel comfortable to think about the waste deposits underground. I also think it is very tricky when it comes to the metals they need for the green infrastructure. This means we need more mines. So, we need mines, but at the same time they destroy the environment. And even IF it would be possible to have a sustainable mining as such, the trucks that transport things to and from the mines would surely be run on diesel. I guess wind power could be ok, as long as they are put where they do not disturb for instance reindeer. We have a windmill on the other side of the lake from where we live. I think the local Sámi reindeer herding community have a deal where they can use some of the electricity that is produced. That compensates a bit for the problems it causes when the reindeer refuse to go near.

The people that are the current political leaders in Sweden do not understand environmental protection at all. The environmental politics are going downhill! I feel so sorry for the young people. I never talk with my children about this. It is too depressing, even though my daughter works as a natural scientist with questions that relates to green infrastructure.

It is true that we might not have so many drastic natural disasters here. They exist but are slower. Like the fact that the glaciers melt. This has a huge effect on the micro flora and micro fauna. And when I look out to what is happening around the world, it feels sad. It is very worrying to think of landslides and rising sea levels.

So, what can we do to change things around? If it was up to me. I would stop the use of fossil fuel all together. All vehicles should be run on ethanol or electricity. The industry would have to stop dirty emissions at once. In the reindeer herding community it is also important to be more vigilant and not use snowmobiles excessively. No cars should be allowed in city centres. People can learn how to walk again!

Quotes

A thing I noticed this summer is that there seemed to be more leaves on the trees. So, the forest felt really dense. Not bigger leaves, but more leaves.

I actually think it's good that the price on fuel is pretty high right now. It's not negative. It's makes people sparser. I don't think now is the time to lower gasoline prices.

I don't like nuclear power at all. It's like going back in time. It's not fun to think about those repositories deep down in the ground. I feel sorry for young people growing up now.

Keywords

Foraging, fossil fuel, green infrastructure, mountain area, public transportation, reindeer herding

RL1_SE06, Sweden, Reindeer herding relatives affected by climate change and exploitations

Narrative

I am a 62-year-old man. I live in a larger city in the north of Sweden. I am of Sami origin. I have lived here for 40 years, but I was born and raised even further north in a reindeer herding family and I often visit my family there. As a teenager, I was keen on taking on the job as a herder, but my family did not have enough reindeer. I chose to educate myself instead. Today I work in higher education with Sami related issues. I have a wife and 2 grown up children.

I see changes in the weather. The winter tend to come later. Usually, we cannot go on skies until February. Also, it seems to be more common that we get a lot of snow and then it rains. It then becomes cold again and everything freezes over. It has been very tough for my reindeer herding relatives. It is difficult for the reindeer to dig down to get food when there is a thick ice layer. And the problem is, it is not only the climate change that is affecting conditions for herders and reindeer. There are so many other exploitations that has a negative effect. The grazing areas for the reindeer are getting scarcer and it is increasingly more difficult for the reindeer to live freely. Sometimes, I think that reindeer herding in the future will be more like farming than herding.

The exploitations in my home community, it is mostly related to mining. There is a large mining company which business means that both herders and other members of the community must adjust to it as the company needs more land to extend their mining. For the reindeer herders this means that there are virtually no ways for them to pass with the reindeer at certain times of the year. They must move the reindeer on trucks. The mining company also uses trucks for their transportations. They go right through the reindeer herding area. There are a lot of trucks as it is, approximately one transport every six minutes, but now they will increase the number of transportations even further as the mining operation in scaling up.

In other words, there are many threats to reindeer herding today. It is not easy to be a herder. Except for the changing weather conditions and the negative effects on grazing that comes with climate change, there are also all the other exploitations of the area: mining, forestry, wind power, etc. One of my friends, who is a herder, jokingly referred to the green transformation as the “Black transformation”.

Reindeer herders have throughout history been good at adapting to changing weather and other things. This is how reindeer herding has survived for all these years. But now, I don't know. It is a difficult situation. If we must continue to feed the reindeer and keep them fenced in during winter, it will be another life. It also very expensive. Of course, one can always increase prices on the meat. But meat from fenced in reindeer will mean that the “wilderness taste” (Swe: viltsmak) will be lost. And reindeer meat would lose its reputation as an exotic meat product.

On an international level we need political decisions to end the use of fossil fuels and the use of oil. But this is difficult, of course. On an individual level... Well, up north and among my relatives. They might not be so knowledgeable about the scientific grounds for climate change and what we need to do to save the planet. But they live a simpler life in many ways that is more environmentally friendly. Many of them are herders or they make handicraft for a living. They are more self-sufficient. They hunt and fish and live more out of what nature gives.

Quotes



Being a reindeer herder today is not easy. Given the climate change and grazing conditions. And then there's the forestry, too and all the windmills. And then this green transition... I heard (X) calling it "the black transition. So, for reindeer herders it is not a green transition.

Reindeer herders have always been good at adapting to climate changed and other things. [...] The question is whether we will have to start feeding the reindeer all year round. But it will be expensive. Maybe it will add up financially if you can charge a higher slaughter price. But with reindeer that have been given fodder, you lose the game flavour and then it is also not as exotic a meat product. And herders will become more of a farmer than a reindeer herder in that case.

RL1_SE07, Sweden, Does the best to live sustainable, but is most afraid of the war

Narrative

I live in a city in the north of Sweden. I am 62 years old. I am of Sámi origin and was born in a smaller town further north, but I have lived in this bigger city practically my whole life. I come from a reindeer herding family, and this is something that I carry with me a lot. I did not take over the reindeer herding business, mostly due to economic reasons. I now work in higher educations. I have a wife and 2 grown up children. The weather has changed a lot. The summers are hotter, and the winter comes later. The snow arrives much later these days. Usually, there is not enough snow for skiing until February. This is a gradual change during the last decades. I am not so worried about the weather changes. As a city person it is nice with warm summers when you can go bathing and spend a lot of time outside.

One of the drawbacks of the warmer weather has been the occurrences of forest fires. There were fires all around Sweden in 2014 and 2018, for instance. Hopefully, the authorities learnt something from this, and that the preparedness is better now. On the other hand, these things tend to be forgotten after a while. Both people and authorities responsible relax after a while and that preparedness is forgotten.

In my family we try our best to do what we can in terms of sustainable living. We recycle our waste, for instance. We also buy ecological products as far as possible. I think it is important to support producers of ecological products and be part of the sustainable development. We are not "preppers", but we do have water stored for emergency. In the academic world that I belong to, we are quite well informed and well educated. Most of my friends care about the environment in the same way as I do. Of course, some are even more "hard core", and try even more to live sustainably.

One thing that annoys me is the fact that there is much more cardboard packaging now in our recycling room. We all buy more stuff online and therefor the number of

cardboard boxes increase. But people do not care to fold them properly! They just toss them in the container, which means that a few boxes take up so much space! In my family we talk about these things sometimes. But not so much. It is not like we worry. We try to save electricity and energy, but this is related more to the ongoing war in Ukraine. The war is like a reminder that a crisis or even war might hit us, and it is good to be prepared. Generally, the war worries me much more than the climate crisis. On an individual level we must all come together and do what we can. In an urban area, there are so many of us and we have to care about it. Otherwise, it would be unbearable. With my relatives in the countryside, it's another thing. They don't talk about sustainable living so much, but they are sort of doing it in practice. They are more self-sufficient and naturally use less resources.

On a global level we really need to do something about the use of fossil fuels, use of oil, and other things that are polluting the air. To a certain extent nation states' policy can influence the development. In Sweden, though, I think the current government has deprioritised environmental issues. The environment does not mean anything to them.

We talk a lot about green infrastructure in Sweden. But it seems that green infrastructure requires a lot of energy to implement! For instance, they are building a new steel factory in Boden that is to produce fossil free steel. But it will require half of Sweden's current electricity production. I do not think this is the solution.

The bottom line is that we must globally lower the carbon emissions. I think we should do what Greta Thunberg tells us: we must listen to the researchers. Another important thing is to foster democracy. Democracy is an important enabler for a more sustainable future.

It is of essence to take a global stance on these issues. It must be solved through international cooperation. As an example: During the 2014 forest fire in Västmanland, I was visiting my relatives up north. One day we felt fire smoke, and I called a friend of mine that work for the local fire department to hear where the fire was. It turned out that it was the fire from Västmanland, 1000 kilometres away, that we could sense! Then you realise how small the world is and how connected we are. What if the glaciers in Siberia melts and let out meringue gas? It would surely affect us all.

I believe that my Sámi reindeer herding background affects the way I see and things. I tend to interpret weather changes as a reindeer herder, even though I live in a city. It is a perspective and a kind of knowledge that I always carry with me.

Quotes

Fuel and oil pollute nature. And here we must do something internationally. But the green transition requires so much energy! To reduce carbon emissions is important and we have to trust what the scientists say. I also believe that we should get rid of all despots and appoint democratically elected figures. I think that would help.

Right now, I'm mostly worried about war and things like that. But of course, I think about the climate too. But I don't go and think about it all the time. I try to do what I can to contribute anyway.

Keywords

Recycling, urban area, global interconnectedness, Sámi, forest fire.

RL1_SE08, Sweden, The stressful everyday life of a reindeer herder

Narrative

I am a 60-year-old man who lives in the north of Sweden. I have a wife and three children. I am Sámi and work as a reindeer herder. I also have a second business: a forestry service operation. It is only a small business with one employee beside me. I see myself as a modern nomad. I am often out in the forest or in the mountains with the reindeer. The most permanent living address is where my wife and children usually live and where the children go to school. But then we have another house close to where the reindeer are in the winter. I live here mostly during the winter and the rest of the family joins me here on vacations and holidays.

I have worked with reindeer herding my whole life. I was brought up with it and felt that I didn't really have a choice but to continue this lifestyle. It was in many ways decided for me. I've been lucky that I have managed rather well and have been able to carry on the legacy. My sons are still young, but they seem keen on taking over after me. But I am very careful not to push them. I did not have a choice, but I want them to have a choice. It is okay if they decide to do something else with their lives. Reindeer herding is a tough and vulnerable business. I only keep going for my children's sake, to be able to transfer knowledge that they must have, should they choose to continue with our reindeer. They are with me as often as they can, and in the summers the whole family spend time with the reindeer in the mountains. But on the whole, I am worried that I don't have time with giving my children the viable knowledge that they need, since I have to spend so much time away from my family.

The climate change is very obvious for us herders. It affects us in the everyday life. The weather is much more unstable now. The autumns is longer and when the snow comes, it is common these days that there will be thaw, than colder again, so that an ice layer will prevent reindeer to get to the grass. It seems to be windier as well.

It is very distressing every autumn and we worry how the weather will be. In practical terms it means that we have to use the snowmobile much more in order to herd the reindeer to different areas where we know there is food for them. Before when the weather was more stable and grazing more secure, we could stay with the reindeer in one place for longer. Long ours on the snowmobile is tough on the body and it becomes a working environment problem. When grazing is scarce it also means a psychosocial

strain. We have to put in more hours but still feel that we don't get the job done properly. It takes a toll on your social life, and you have less time to go home to you family. The whole family is affected by it. Economically it is also difficult. Bad grazing conditions means that we have to buy fodder, and this is really expensive. All this is a direct consequence of climate change.

The reindeer are affected, too. We often have to forcefully herd the reindeer to new areas in search of food. When the reindeer can't find food, they lose their orientation skills and get confused. This means that we need to help them find their way to better grazing grounds and it can be quite stressful for them. It is especially hard on the calves, and it happens that they die.

Another negative consequence of all this is that there is more disagreement among us reindeer herders. For instance, if some want to use fodder and others don't, maybe due to their economic situation, it is a potential conflict. Also, when we need to work so hard nowadays, stress and irritation build up and it is easy to get annoyed if you feel that others put less effort into the job.

Since reindeer herding has change so much from when I grew up, you must build up new knowledge around it. The changes are so fundamental.

It is impossible for most of us herders to get by with just herding. We need other odd jobs to make ends meet. So, when there is a slower period with the reindeer we must take on jobs in the mining industry or within forestry. That is why I have my side business. But there are many mixed emotions concerning this. In many ways mining and forestry are industries that destroy the possibility to conduct sustainable and viable herding. These are industries that destroy valuable lands. The way current forestry operates leave the land unfit for herding. What we need is old forests.

If I could do something else to make an extra income, I would. But I have no choice. I feel like a prostitute, selling my body, my labour force, to the industry that is making it difficult for me to earn a living as a reindeer herder in the first place, making me part of the problem. It is a sad and hopeless situation.

Sometimes I am part of consultations between the reindeer herders and the forest companies. I am sort of wearing two hats then. The forest companies will say: "If you don't let us continue with the logging, you will lose your extra income!". It is so absurd. We do not want to stop logging completely, but we want to see a forestry that is more sustainable long term. As it is now, there is a lack of policies and regulations. The forest companies are allowed to harvest with only maximum economic profit in mind. They do not care about what is best for nature or animals. However, there are glimpses of hopes here, as I think that the general public wants to see another type of forestry in Sweden, and also recognises the importance of securing a viable reindeer herding practice. Lately, us reindeer herders have strengthened our position somewhat through benevolent court rulings. This is a good tendency.

I think society should step in and help the reindeer herders. In my opinion, there should be a large fund (with money from the state, the large forestry companies and the EU) that could help financing extra fodder or transportation of reindeer. Since society need to exploit resources in a way that is not compatible with a viable reindeer herding practice, they must step up and help us survive.

I also think that it would be good to do a more scientific and long-term study of the carrying capacity of different kind of reindeer herding practices, like having the reindeer

fenced it or let lose. This could relate to an economic turnover, but also to work related issues and the quality of the meat.

To me, living sustainably is important. But I see other members of the (non-Sámi) community that are not willing to change their way of life at all. There are many climate deniers and Greta-haters! And it is mostly a male phenomenon. Women seem to have more knowledge and awareness of these things. But I am often ashamed of other middle-aged men.

It is important for me to be prepared for critical situations. I have food and water stored. Some people up here talk about having their fridges full of food, but what happens if there is no electricity? It is important to have a plan for how to get food, water, shelter and dry wood if a crisis hits us. To learn how to dry and salt your meat is more important than putting food in the freezer.

On a global level we must work out an agreement that every nation take responsibility for. But of course, it is difficult to get everyone to report their level of emissions in a fair and just way. There are a lot of cheating when it comes to that and difficult to have a good control system in place.

I am worried for the future. Climate change and explorations are a real threat to reindeer herding. And also with the current government, I am afraid that there will be policies that reduce Sami rights and diminishes environmental protection mechanisms.

My message is for everyone to spread knowledge about reindeer herding and the life of reindeer herders. We must all help to create a sustainable situation for reindeer herding. After all, if there would be a crisis in society, we are able to provide meat!

Quotes

For us herders, changes in the climate affect our everyday lives directly. Previously, the autumns were more stable. Sure, there were thaws sometimes. But the autumns were stable, and the winters were cold and snowy.

For were the forest companies more concerned about the old-growth forest. There is a lot of reserve grazing for the reindeer. But now there is so much pressure on timber that our reserve grazing is removed. We have opposed. Sometimes we manage to slow down a bit, but it does not turn out to any extent that we would like. Well, what happens then? Well, we need to buy feed for the reindeer. But it costs a lot of pgs. Then I have to work extra every free hour instead of devoting myself to the family, the children or maintenance. Then I become like a prostitute and say that whoever has money can buy my body or my service. And then the forest companies say, "you can come and work for us". They make you clear the land where they have logged so new plants can be planted.

[..] They know we are fragile. We're trying to get out of the situation but it's not easy.

How to prepare for crisis? Prepping. We are well prepared for a crisis and that is important to me. The freezer is full, but that's if there's electricity. You have to have a stock. You have to think, where can I get firewood and water and where can we get shelter. I'm very prepared. Salt and smoke, dry food better.

Keywords

Reindeer herding, forestry, work conditions, indigenous rights,

RL1_SE09, Sweden, Tourist station off the beaten track

Narrative

I am a 32-year-old woman. I live in a city in the north of Sweden. My family consists of my boyfriend and a dog. I am a manager at a tourist station owned by the Swedish Tourist Association (STF). The station is situated in the mountain region, off the beaten track. There is a large river close to the station. I am at the station from mid-January to mid-October. At times my boyfriend visits, or I can take a short break and go home. I have worked there for over 10 years. Having worked there for so long, I feel connected to the land, and also, I have in-laws who have been reindeer herders in the area for a long time. Being born and raised here in the north of Sweden means that you are affected by, and engaged in, climate change and the development of green infrastructure.

When it comes to changes in the environment, one thing that is obvious is that the tree line is further up in the mountains than it used to be. If you compare pictures of the mountain slopes that are only a few decades old, it is clearly noticeable. Another strange thing is that has change is that the so called “lemming years” (when lemmings are numerous, usually every 3 or 4 years) have stopped. There was a lemming year in 2011, but not since then. The weather is usually more unstable, with long periods of warm weather during the winter. The winter seem to come later and last longer in the year. There are also periods of strong winds, even storms. This has increased lately, and I think this is related to climate change.

Our tourist station is close to a large river. In the summer we take tourists and merchandise via boat, and in the wintertime, we use snowmobiles on the ice. We plan so we move larger and heavier equipment during the wintertime. It is easier to take such thing on the snowmobile rather than lifting them on and off boats. But we have a problem. There is a large hydroelectric power plant up stream. It is the large company “Vattenfall” that operates it. According to agreement, they should have a low production right now in order for the ice to be able to set downstream. But instead, they seem to have opened the dams more. The ice has not set properly, making it difficult and dangerous for us to cross the river and get to the tourist station. Of course, this is related to the current crisis and shortage of electricity in the country. We used to be able to trust our agreement, but they seem to be operating in breach of it now. It is the same in the springtime. According to the agreement they are supposed to keep the production at a low level so that the ice is

strong until May 1. But sometimes, the ice breaks weeks before that as they are letting too much water out. Vattenfall are obliged to provide us with alternatives, like helicopters, if we cannot use snowmobiles to cross the river.

At the tourist station, the only time we are in contact with Vattenfall is if we need them to provide us with alternative vehicles. Otherwise, there is no direct communication. We get information about the water levels and if the ice has set from other local residents that work with other nature management issues around here and can observe the river. Still, it is easier for us as a large association to have a say in the matter. But many local people feel run over. They feel that they have no way of complaining in case they need to use the river to deliver goods or get to the other side for some reason. Many reindeer herding families have cottages on the other side of the river. Big companies like Vattenfall do not care how their operation affects the ordinary person. And as a tourist station, we have had to shorten our season several times because of insecurities concerning if the ice will hold or not.

The business at our tourist station is not really threatened by climate change. Tourists will come, regardless of if the weather and landscape change. For the reindeer herders around our station, however, there is a lot of worry. They particularly worry about the winter seasons when the food for the reindeer is scarce. The reindeer herding business is affected by climate change directly in a way that our tourist business is not. On a more general note, tourism in itself can pose a threat to nature if there are too many tourists in one place. Mass tourism might change a landscape and do harm to the environment. Where we are, this is not a problem so far. One thing that might affect us is if they were to open a mine nearby. There are plans for this. But there is also a World Heritage status in place around here. UNESCO has indicated that if there will be a mine so close to the World Heritage site, the World Heritage status would be withdrawn. This could certainly mean that we would get fewer visitors.

At our tourist station we constantly work to improve our sustainability approach. Trash is recycled and taken (by snowmobile or boat) to the other side of the river and to a recycling station. We try to decrease the number of glass bottles, by using as much bag-in-box as possible. We constantly think of ways to decrease food waste and buy seasonable food. One thing we would like to invest in is a compost grinder. But so far, there has not been financial room to invest in one. We are certified Green Key and KRAV and are involved in ongoing sustainability courses through the STF. We have our own sustainability goals that we revise every year. However, being situated where we are, far away in the mountains without roads, also means that we need to be flexible. You must be a realist, too. For instance, we could never have electric cars up here. There is nowhere to charge them.

I often think that it is important that I try to influence things from within the STF organisation. In conversations within the organisation, I often emphasise the importance of tourist stations to be part of the surrounding society and being good neighbours with those who live around us and use the land we are part of.

Quotes

We have big problems with the ice, that it doesn't settle. Right now, the ice is not thick enough to travel on. And that's because they're letting out too much water from the tanks

in the dam. It is something that becomes unsafe for us who operate a facility on the other side. It was more stable before [...] They say they have low production to let the ice to settle but is just not true.

We sort waste at the mountain station and transfer the garbage every day to a recycling station. We're trying to reduce the percentage of glass bottles. We have bag in box and draft beer instead. We're constantly working to reduce waste all the time, and not to throw away food and such, and to reduce transportation.

Keywords

Tourism, tourist station, STF, hydroelectric power plant, sustainable business, recycling, mountain area.

RL1_SE10, Sweden, Young woman worried about developments in green infrastructure

Narrative

I am a 32-year-old woman. I live in a city in the north of Sweden. I work within the tourism industry. I share my apartment with my boyfriend and my dog.

I have noticed changes in the weather. The winters come later. There are warmer periods during winter in a way that we did not see before. It might rain even, and then it freezes again. It is really unpredictable.

I think it is a shame what we do to the environment. Throughout the Nordic region of the country there are large resource extractions like aggressive forestry and mining. With the wrong kind of political leadership there could be mines everywhere here. Not even a national park-label might protect lands from mining. It is sad to me. But for older people who have grown up close to nature, to them it is even worse. People have strong feelings for the place where they grew up.

My parents' and my grandparents' generations lived a more sustainable and self-sufficient life. They were all farmers and lived on the land, beside hunting and fishing. Up here in the North, things have changed enormously in a short time span. It would have been good, if parts of this way of living was still intact.

Up here, we are allergic to all the talk about Green Deal and developing green infrastructure. It is all happening so fast, and it is like the resources up here are up for grabs. I have heard that green infrastructure companies want to get over "the hurdles" that is preventing a quick green transformation. With "hurdles" they mean different appeal processes and consultations with local groups. But these are important democratic

principles. There are many exploitations made in the name of green infrastructure that is not really green. I have heard them talking about the extraction of iron ore as part of the Green Deal. Iron ore is hardly needed to develop green infrastructure.

As an individual, you can do your part. Personally, I think of cutting back on food waste, consumption and car driving. But we can only do so much. It is on a systemic level that things must change. Better regulations both nationally and internationally is needed. We need global climate agreements. But to me it is important that rich countries aren't allowed to buy their way out of the deal and leave the responsibility to poorer countries. We in the rich world must take our responsibility. It is important that we stop the exploitation of the environment on a global level. It might sound a bit drastic, but I think that it should be illegal for people to own as many things as they do today. There should be limits to that. We should be allowed to own just as much as we need. We should be taught to use the resources we have, before we explore new resources. It is important to let the nature and the wild animals recuperate. We need to let nature alone for a while.

In the city where I live, many people work in the local mine. And a lot of people like the mine. It is frustrating to see how ignorant many people are here, driving their cars and consuming too much. I find many people here very materialistic. They earn a lot of money working for the mine and buy flashy cars and big houses. It is a way to show off, I guess.

But many people here also love nature, so they have a kind of double nature. They love to go fishing and hunting and just spending time in the forest or mountains. Still, they work for extracting businesses that destroy the lands. I have a friend that is a therapist. She says that many of her clients talk about this. How they don't want to work for the mine and be part of that kind of industry, but they feel that they do not have a choice. Big houses and big cars are things that silence their bad conscience.

I worry a bit for the future. But it is important also that your worry does not leave you totally incapacitated. I am not into prepping. We have a freezer full of food, but I am not sure what we would do if the electricity went off for a longer period of time. We do not have a wood burner, for instance so we would surely be cold. In a crisis situation the broader family would be important. We would help each other. Together we would be able to keep safe and warm.

To enable change and to make a difference, I think it is important to work together. To rally support from people around you. There is a strength in numbers.

I come back to the main message: Our region is seen as some kind of modern Klondike. There is a competition to extract all the resources here. But we who live here feel overrun. This is a great worry to many. The waterways have been dammed in the first half of the last century. It meant large infringements on the environment and did great harm to people who uses the land, like reindeer herders. I worry that the same thing will happen again. The political power in Sweden is so centralised to the southern part of the country and no one listens to us or care about our opinion.

Quotes

It's very materialistic here. There is big money in the mining industry and people buy things to silence their conscience. [...]. Why buy so many cars and houses? It's such a waste of resources. Many people have houses they only live in occasionally. But they want to own it. [...]. Many people love to be in nature and to fish and ski. It's the most

important thing in people's lives. That's why they live here. There's always some kind of duplicity in it.

I find it annoying that politics is so centralised. There is no one who represents our values, or the lives that we live up here.

Keywords

Green deal, green infrastructure, mining.

RL1_PT01, Portugal, Vítor, retired, resident in a social neighbourhood

Narrative

I am an elderly man of 79 years of age, retired, from the north of Portugal). I am married and have two daughters. I started working at a very young age (13), under very hard conditions, building roads; my parents sent me to Lisbon to work in 1966. By chance I was lucky to adapt to the city, I came from the province where I worked digging ditches with pickaxes and went to work on the building sites. At least it didn't rain, and I didn't get wet as easily as I did working in the north.

I started working in construction, where I learned the trade of a plumber, which I did for 20 years in various companies. Although I was mobilised for the Overseas War (1973), the plumber's trade allowed me to stay in Portugal and avoid being on the war scene. I came to live in this neighbourhood, which was a slum, clandestine, and remained so until 1984. During this period, I married and had two daughters. During that time, we built a clandestine house for me on the outskirts of Lisbon and I helped my brothers to build another one for their family (unlicensed works, in Odivelas). After the demolition of the shacks a housing cooperative was built and we moved into these flat blocks, where I still live today. The harsh working conditions as a plumber caused me back pain, so I had to look for a job at the town hall, and then I started working as a street sweeper. Later I got a job as a driver for these cleaning teams, which I kept for 20 years until I retired. My neighbourhood is located in a privileged place, which is a forested area, and also has a good view. Despite the intense traffic on the road (three lane highway) and the noise of the train, we feel the fresh air. I don't remember us having any flooding problems here, we are higher up the valley bottom and besides that a big underground pipeline passes nearby. Our houses, as they were built through a cooperative, the contractor eschewed certain types of things, so these houses should have better insulation conditions (air chamber). We are here in a place that, when we have cold weather, we turn on portable

heaters; when it's summer, it's wonderful. When I don't feel well outdoor environment conditions, I go home, turn on the television, turn on the air conditioning. When they built these community gardens and this park the environment improved a lot. We need more preparation to face natural disasters, more information should be provided by the government and local authorities.

My only access to information about natural hazards is through the news on television. People are not sufficiently aware of environmental problems, such as air and water pollution.

Quotes

I came to live in this neighbourhood (Lisbon), which were slums, clandestine, and remained so until 1984.

After the demolition of the slums, a housing cooperative was built and we moved to these flat blocks, where I reside until today.

Our houses, as they were made through a cooperative, the contractor eschewed certain kinds of things, so these houses should have better insulation conditions (air box).

We need more preparation to face natural disasters, more information actions should be provided by the government and local authorities. My only access to information about natural hazards is through the news on TV. Here everyone has a television. But people are not aware enough of environmental problems, like air and water pollution.

Keywords

Older people; slums; illegal built neighbourhoods; social dwellings; indoor housing conditions; thermal stress adaptation

RL1_PT02, Portugal, Nepalese immigrant living in precarious conditions with wife and daughter

Narrative



I am a 38-year-old Nepali, married with one daughter. I am living in Lisbon after having left my country because of cultural problems. My marriage to my wife violates the caste system in my country and this means that we are excluded from a large number of situations (families find it difficult to accept the marriage) and we are permanently forced to hide our identity. I grew up in a rural area 130 kilometres from Kathmandu and joined the (paramilitary) military services in my country, where I was working until I emigrated. I always wanted to pursue my studies and sought the opportunity to study abroad during my master's degree. I was able to achieve this experience through an Erasmus programme that allowed me to study for a semester in Greece. At that time, I was already married and my daughter was already born. The difficulties we experienced in Nepal because of our caste differences, led my wife to ask me to look for a place to live outside the country once and for all. I looked for a country that seemed to have favourable migrant integration policies for our situation (allowing us to work and study) and we found that Portugal offered what we were looking for. The process of arriving in Portugal was not easy. First my wife stayed here with my daughter because I had to return to Nepal. During that time I took the opportunity to end my professional ties in the military service and later travelled to Portugal. When I arrived, Portugal went into lockdown and closed its borders because of covid, and I ended up being stuck in the country for quite some time. My wife is now working in the foreign service, and I managed to get a PhD scholarship in my area of interest. I currently live in a house with very bad conditions, very small and without windows, and with a lot of humidity, but we cannot afford to move because of the high price of housing in Portugal. Neither can we find affordable houses, nor can we access the mortgage for housing due to lack of income. I have never been exposed to a natural disaster in Portugal, although in Nepal I survived the big earthquake of 2015 and that forced me to evacuate the house and live in a place of refuge (church) with my family and many other inhabitants of the region for more than 15 days. In Portugal I was very impressed by the forest fires that caused the death of several people. I feel that heat is a problem in Portugal and when I am outside on a hot day and exposed to the sun for a while, I get headaches and need to take refuge. I have the feeling that in Portugal the houses are not prepared for the cold and heat and do not have many acclimatization systems. On the other hand, it seems to me that not everyone suffers in the same way. The poorest and most vulnerable are more affected (by heat). I think the role of the community and neighbours in the process of preparing for and responding to natural disasters is crucial. In this sense, I felt that in Nepal the community was stronger and more united to protect itself.

Quotes

I saw many, uh, fire, fire in the houses in, uh, the fire in the jungle. Last time we heard the big fire on the jungle. And, uh, people were trapped inside. (...) I heard some story that people, some person, they hide inside the cave or inside the big rock and saved their lives like this. Uh, and I saw many houses on the way when we travel, like then, uh, I think it's because of the heat wave, because of the big, uh, heat wave. Um, the fire gets quickly. That is why.

For me, it was terrific because it's one thing that in Nepal, when I work, I work only freely outside, even in the daytime midday time and the big sun. But here, when I walk on the road during the daytime, even the small, the sun hits me. I feel pain in the head, you know? I don't know what the difference is between the sun in Nepal and here, but here I feel, uh, the, the pain.

If the heat wave comes, then the people like us, we are living without the windows and, the bad condition. They, they, I think they will be affected. The first, the first. Yeah. I, I saw many people there are living in the road also here. They're living under the bridges. The homeless people. Yes. They will be affected the first.

Keywords

Preparedness, heat waves, emigration, housing conditions, income

RL1_PT03, Portugal, Retired and volunteer at the senior civil protection academy

Narrative

I am 65 years retired and a widow. I was born in Viseu where I lived until I was 10 years old. I went to Africa, from where I returned when I was 22 (in 1980), I worked since 1980 in a company that sold hotel equipment and I retired at the age of 55. During retirement I have dedicated myself to volunteering. In 2014 I joined the Senior Civil Protection Agents project, in the Seixal city council. In this project, I have collaborated in many trainings in schools and the contact with children has been wonderful. However, the activities I am most dedicated to now are Archaeology (volunteer), the Senior Academy and Civil Protection, which occupy me a lot of time. Then I joined other institutions but, at the moment, I only really work in voluntary archaeological excavations, civil protection and the archaeology museum. On a personal level, I have been through some complicated situations during my life. In 2017, the fire that broke out burned everything and only the house was not consumed. My village was completely surrounded by flames, and the fire burned everything next to the houses, although it didn't get inside the houses, it burned the walls. Even now, I was there in August and it's very complicated to see, again the houses affected, it's very complicated... the mountains there in my area, in my land, the mountains are all bare, there are no pine trees, no vegetation, there's nothing, everything is missing, we need our life, our existence! I have noticed that there are many changes happening, many indeed, for example, in the fields. where fruit is produced, this year it didn't come like last year. The fruit this year, due to the change of heat and the lack of rain

almost disappeared. When I go to pick fruit on the trees, I see that the tree no longer gives that fruit that we took a bite out of... there is no juice in the fruit. We have had very hot days... Take today's case. as today, it is not cold and that is not normal. We're having cold weather, but it's still not normal. So, all this has been changed, I think we only have I am 65 years old and a widow. I was born in Mangualde where I lived until I was 10 years old.

I went to Africa, from where I returned when I was 22 (in 1980), I worked since 1980 in a company that sold hotel equipment and I retired at the age of 55. During retirement I have dedicated myself to volunteering. In 2014 I joined the Senior Civil Protection Agents project, in the Amadora city council. In this project, I have collaborated in many trainings in schools and the contact with children has been wonderful. However, the activities I am most dedicated to now are Archaeology (volunteer), the Senior Academy and Civil Protection, which occupy me a lot of time. Then I joined other institutions but, at the moment, I only really work in voluntary archaeological excavations, civil protection and the archaeology museum. On a personal level, I have been through some complicated situations during my life. In 2017, the fire that broke out burned everything and only the house was not consumed. My village was completely surrounded by flames, and the fire burned everything next to the houses, although it didn't get inside the houses, it burned the walls. Even now, I was there in August and it's very complicated to see, again the houses affected, it's very complicated... the mountains there in my area, in my land, the mountains are all bare, there are no pine trees, no vegetation, there's nothing, everything is missing, we need our life, our existence! I have noticed that there are many changes happening, many indeed, for example, in the fields. where fruit is produced, this year it didn't come like last year. The fruit this year, due to the change of heat and the lack of rain almost disappeared. When I go to pick fruit on the trees, I see that the tree no longer gives that fruit that we took a bite out of... there is no juice in the fruit. We have had very hot days... Take today's case. as today, it is not cold and that is not normal. We're having cold weather, but it's still not normal. So, all this has been changed, I think we only have two seasons in the year, we have summer and winter, we don't have spring and autumn anymore, it's like that, everything has changed.

Quotes

If we go around the neighbourhood, what you see is the old people, because the new ones are few. Because people came, many came from Africa, found the house, stayed there and now they're old.

I think there should be more disclosure of the situations that are happening, because many of the people don't talk to anyone either. What I think is that the parishes, the heads of the neighbourhoods, the Parish Councils is that they should give more meetings to advise people, what are they going to do? What are they not going to do? What have you prepared? How do the time changes? Here there are many changes in time, have you noticed it or not? What do you think? I think that's what's missing, that information is missing!

I am very concerned about what can come yet, because it comes, I'm worried about what might come, because more and more disasters, in terms of rains, earthquakes, fires, there

will be more and more. People are not convinced that the situation is happening. In my opinion, I think more and more will be worse.

Keywords

Volunteering, forest fires, natural disasters anxiety, preparedness, resilience

RL1_PT04, Portugal, José, 75 years old pensioner and volunteer

Narrative

My name is José, and I am 75. I am married, no children, my wife is retired like me. I was born in the São Jorge parish, Lisbon. I lived in Lisbon during my youth. When my parents got sick, I had to start working. I got a job as an electrician in the Lisbon shipyards. I remember clearly these times because I was already dating my wife. By these times, I also remember two major natural disasters that hit Lisbon: the great floods of November 1967 and the 1969 earthquake; Just after the 1969 earthquake, I was sent to the army, in Angola. In 1973 I came back from overseas (Angola), and return the work in the shipyard's facilities, in Setúbal (Setenave enterprise). I stayed two years working in Setúbal and, meanwhile I started studying at night, completing an industrial course. Then I moved to Lisbon again, to work in another enterprise, the EDP ("Electricity of Portugal"). I worked in this company for 20 years, working on the automation of power plants, not just in mainland Portugal, but also in Azores and Madeira. I lived in Lisbon and Seixal, until today. Where I lived (in Seixal), the houses were not built to be prepared for cold and heat, they were not well insulated. Later, I replaced all the wooden windows with aluminium windows and added double-glazed windows. Comfort has improved and the noise of trains is no longer felt. Finally, I became sick with arrhythmia problems, and I had to retire. I am retired since 2008.

Since then, me and my wife start to integrate the concept of volunteering. We get to know that the Parish Council (Seixal) was offering training courses on Civil Protection open to interested retired people available to collaborate as "Civil Protection Agents", especially participating in information campaigns in schools, old-people's homes, etc. Sometimes, we have received instruction courses in the Red Cross, Civil Protection, and the Police, and it has been interesting to try to help other people provide useful information to them. Currently, I am very worried about the Ukraine war, we'll never know how this conflict will continue, and I fear nuclear weapons...; the living conditions are also getting worse due to the rising inflation. Climate change is also a concern because

climatic extremes are becoming more extremes, like heatwaves, and floods. Climate is changing and becoming stranger.

Quotes

Where I lived, the houses were not built to be prepared for cold and heat, they were not well insulated. Later, I replaced all the wooden windows by aluminium windows and added double-glazed windows. Comfort has improved and the noise of trains is no longer felt. There is an awareness for these phenomena (natural hazards) (...) in addition, there has been more information, through the media. So, people are much more aware of this. Today, what it seems to me, all these transformations. Wars... time, pandemics. Sometimes I start thinking about the movies I saw when I was young. Science-fiction. Movies where it was a pandemic, everybody died. I remember that. I'm more and more afraid.

Climate change is also a concern because climatic extremes are becoming more extremes, like heatwaves, and floods. Climate is changing and becoming stranger.

Keywords

Volunteering; preparedness; housing conditions; fear due to war and economic crisis

RL1_PT05, Portugal, Community leader and volunteer at the senior civil protection academy

Narrative

I am sixty-six years old. I have been retired for eight years. I have always lived in Lisbon, and I live alone with my wife. I was an accountant, and I was connected with the management of the material assets of the University of Medicine. I am a proactive elderly person and I try to participate actively in the community. I am part of the pensioners association of my neighbourhood, and I am also part of the civil protection volunteer project. I have also been involved for almost 40 years in a third division football club, where I have been responsible for the security system in the stadium. As I told you, I am very active and even thinking of reducing my involvement in some things in order to rest a bit. I have a daughter who has two children, a five-year-old and a seven-year-old, whom I

support when they need me. Here, in the senior civil protection project, we have been going to schools, talking to the children, who like to see us. Sometimes we also do drills, we participate, but we also organise exercises. In my opinion, our population is not very interested in knowing about disasters, fires, etc. There is an age group in the community that just no longer wants to know. Although they are very few, there are still some community leaders who are interested, but they are very few. However, I think we are going in the right direction in working with children. There are certain things that they already take home and teach their own parents.

Our society is fragile on many levels. In the knowledge base itself, there is fragility. In some cases, fires themselves are the result of a lack of safety at basic levels, of basic things (for example, in some homes, people plug in numerous appliances that exceed the capacity of the socket out of ignorance, which can cause urban fires). I think when it comes to environmental change, more is said than should be said. In other words, the environment may be changing little by little, but the changes are very slow. and when we hear people talking about their intentions to change behaviour, they should give us more conditions so that there can be a change (for example, for there to be fewer cars, it would be important to have much more public transport, which doesn't exist).

When I was small, I felt the four seasons, and now we don't know how it will be. In this respect, I believe that the environment is indeed changing. These changes threaten us and if we don't have the means to deal with them, we will be very affected, but some people don't realise that.

Here in the community, people in general notice differences, but they don't identify their responsibilities in these changes, especially because they don't have the necessary knowledge. They lack school education. I think that when it comes to environmental changes, more is said than should be said. I mean, the environment may be changing little by little, but it's a very slow change. and when you hear people talking about their intentions to change behaviour, they should give us more. People don't pay attention to the warnings that are given in cases of extreme events. It is more important the information that is given by friends, than announcements or warnings. I was in the area affected by the big fires of 2017. I was 1km from where it all started. I went looking for what was going on because I could see some smoke, but it wasn't in our direction and when we got to a neighbouring village, we saw the huge fire that destroyed everything, took everything, burst, in short..., despite being prepared with water tanks and the bush around the house all cleared. I had to run away. I finished watering the house and took the old people to the centre of town, where we were more protected. I was the last one to leave. Nobody went there to evacuate our area. In my case, the fire did not enter the house. It burned everything else, but the house survived. The community has to have awareness actions, by parishes, at local level, with the population to be better prepared for these disasters. The worse the conditions of poverty, the worse the response to disasters. People in shacks have no conditions, nor do they have someone to teach them how to respond to a disaster. So, they are at a clear disadvantage. For example, in my case, my building has a fire detection system and fire extinguishers. This is the result of our initiative, because there are buildings that have nothing.

Quotes



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The worse the conditions of poverty, the worse the response to disasters. People in shacks have no conditions, nor do they have someone to teach them how to respond to a disaster. So, they are at a clear disadvantage.

Keywords

Volunteering, forest fires, education, preparedness

RL1_PT06, Portugal, Elderly Cape Verdean immigrant

Narrative

I am a 73-year-old immigrant woman from Cape Verde who has lived in Portugal for 47 years. I've been through a lot of bad times in my life. I started working very early as a girl to help my mother because my father died very early, when I was one month and 15 days old. I worked since I was 12 years old on construction sites carrying stones and sand, I also worked on the road as a water carrier (I gave water to the workers). I studied until second grade in Cape Verde, but the teacher beat me a lot and I cried and that's why I left school. Later, when I was 25, my mother gave me land that I sold and I managed to buy a ticket to Lisbon, where I already knew some people. I was at a friend's house for a while. My neighbour let me build a shack on a piece of land and later my husband (whom I met in Portugal), and I built a house with the help of the neighbours using some bricks that were found in an old, abandoned factory nearby. Here in Portugal, it cost me a lot to feed my children..., I sold fish, I sold fruit, I cleaned the streets, I attended the hospital until late at night cleaning, I worked in factories at five in the morning cleaning, I spent a lot of time cold, I worked a lot. I have six children - three from my husband (I already had three children in Cape Verde). We got married in Portugal when we were already old, in our 60s. My life is better now. I earn 350 euros a month and I am already retired. I've always lived in the same house, my house has water and electricity, but that's just more or less... I never suffered from heat, nor was my house affected by water (floods). But I feel cold in the winter, and I don't turn on the heater because it's too expensive. I get worse in the winter. I sometimes call for a little while and then switch off, because of the price of electricity. If the houses are fixed, if there is no basement dwelling, then this is the best thing that can be done in case of floods. It's not good to live like this, people should make

their houses better, but for that they have to have money. In the past, the neighbours were very humble and helped each other a lot... now it's different. (you have to pay for everything). When there are days of heavy rain or bad weather, I watch it on television or talk to the neighbours. That's how I know. The neighbourhood has improved over time. In the past there was no water or electricity, now it's better. I have diabetes and high blood pressure and I take medication for these pathologies. I live with my husband and my son. My husband no longer works because of his back, and he gets depressed often, he doesn't speak. My husband and son drink a lot. There is the problem of alcohol consumption.

Quotes

It cost me a lot to feed my children..., I sold fish, I sold fruit, I cleaned the streets, I attended the hospital until late at night cleaning, I worked in factories at five in the morning cleaning, I spent a lot of time cold, I worked a lot.

But I feel cold in the winter, and I don't turn on the heater because it's too expensive. I get worse in the winter. I sometimes call for a little while and then switch off, because of the price of electricity.

If the houses are fixed, if there is no basement dwelling, then this is the best thing that can be done in case of floods. It's not good to live like this, people should make their houses better, but for that they have to have money.

Keywords

Poverty, immigration, fuel poverty

RL1_PT07, Portugal, Cape Verdean immigrant living in poverty

Narrative

I'm Louise, I am now 42 years old and I'm from Cape Verde, born on the island of Santiago. I live with my daughter of 15 years old in Amadora, Portugal. Back home I worked helping people, people with health problems and I helped them. I worked with Portuguese people on the island of Boavista. My whole family has always lived outside

the country in search of a better life. I have three brothers, a sister and a son who live in France. The bureaucratic process of moving to Portugal was very difficult and I went to Brazil because I already knew a girl there. So I went to Brazil, where I stayed for nine years. In Brazil I had suffered immensely because I gave birth to a little girl there who was born with some problems and ended up passing away. But just when she was going to be fine, she ended up dying due to a medical error. That made me leave Brazil and come here in search of another life. When I came to Portugal, I came to work, although I haven't managed to do so yet. At the moment I cook "Cachupa", "couzcouz" and "torresmos" to sell. My niece lived here in Amadora and that is why I came here. I stayed with her for a while but then she moved to France, and so I looked for a room to stay and that is where I am now living with my daughter Claudete (pseudonym).

Here in the neighbourhood, there are things that needed to be improved. More frequent security is needed here. I have always lived in safe places and here one feels a lack of security. In São Paulo, in Brazil, there was a lot of crime, but I felt safer. On my way to my room, if it's at night, I feel afraid. I lived through very complicated times in the places where I lived, I was not affected directly, but people I knew were affected by natural disasters. People had to leave their homes due to fire, rain and even in some cases where the roof was blown off by the wind. When the weather is dry, people are more confident, and occupy places that are not safe. Then, when it rains, it's complicated... Where I live, I've never heard an alert, but I usually see on TV that it's going to rain. I take notice of these alerts. In these recent episodes of rain (December 2022 floods in Lisbon), I followed the news on the phone, I followed the news a lot. But here in the neighbourhood I didn't feel anything, but there must have been something affected, because this neighbourhood has many buildings that are not prepared for the rains and will soon be affected. My room is not very safe because it is a high place and I have a roof over it, and with the strength of the wind... I can't trust it... I'm afraid of storms. In the last year, since my daughter passed away, I have had several health problems. I am followed by a psychologist and a psychiatrist, but I haven't visited them since I came to Portugal. I take medication every night, otherwise I don't sleep. I also need to take vitamins, because I don't eat.

If there is a natural disaster, I may need to make more effort to go home than before, because I am afraid and fearful for my daughter. If she is away from home, I get very agitated.

The neighbourhood gives me a lot of support, and the association helps me to integrate. I feel very supported.

I have already visited family in France but came back here. My wish is to look for a job and start building a house in Cape Verde where I can one day return to.

Quotes

I lived through very complicated times in the places where I lived, I was not affected directly, but people I knew were affected by natural disasters. People had to leave their homes due to fire, rain and even in some cases where the roof was blown off by the wind.

In these recent episodes of rain, I followed the news on the phone, I followed the news a lot. But here in the neighbourhood I didn't feel anything, but there must have been

something affected, because this neighbourhood has many buildings that are not prepared for the rains and will soon be affected.

My room is not very safe because it is a high place and I have a roof over it, and with the strength of the wind... I can't trust it... I'm afraid storms.

Keywords

Poverty, immigration, mental health

RL1_PT08, Portugal, Bissau-Guinean immigrant living in poverty

Narrative

I am Mariana, I am 37 years old, and I have four children. I was born in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau. I arrived in Portugal on December 22, 2021, so it's been a year. I arrived pregnant and with three more children with me. I came with my husband and with my children and I have no family here in Lisbon. When we arrived, we stayed here in Amadora, at a friend's house and my husband went to work in Cape Verde right after. My husband is working in Cape Verde, he earns 700 euros/month and sends me 500 euros to support our children. I spend 270 euros to pay the rent for the room where I live with my children. I can't pay the rent for a house, we all have to live in one room. I have already managed to put my children in a school and in a kindergarten. Before that, I had already lived with my husband, who is also Guinean, in Cape Verde, for almost 10 years. Now, here, I only have Cape Verdean neighbours, I don't have Guinean neighbours. I'm a little afraid of living here because I live alone with my children, and I hear that there are a lot of robberies around here. Here I feel much colder than in Bissau, because in Guinea it is always very hot. My neighbours don't help me, if I have any need I have to come here to this social support association, asking for help. When my children are sick, I take them to the emergency service of the hospital. I still don't have a family doctor.

Quotes

My husband is working in Cape Verde, he earns 700 euros/month and sends me 500 euros to support our children. I spend 270 euros to pay the rent for the room where I live with my children. I can't pay the rent for a house, we all have to live in one room.

Now, here, I only have Cape Verdean neighbours, I don't have Guinean neighbours. I'm a little afraid of living here because I live alone with my children, and I hear that there are a lot of robberies around here. Here I feel much colder than in Bissau, because in Guinea it is always very hot. My neighbours don't help me, if I have any need I have to come here to this social support association, asking for help. When my children are sick, I take them to the emergency service of the hospital. I still don't have a family doctor.

Keywords

Poverty; immigration; marginalised ethnic minority

RL1_PT09, Portugal, Single mother of five children, one disabled

Narrative

I'm Rita, and I live here, in Amadora, for 42 years, since my parents moved to this neighbourhood. They are from Cape Verde and moved here to join their families. I'm 43 years old and I became a mother at 20. I have five children, one of them with a profound disability. My fourth child was born with a profound disability, today he is 18 years old and can't speak anything. As I have to take care of my disabled son, I cannot work. He stays at a school, but due to his epilepsy, I have to catch him often. My partner left me in 2014 and since then I have been taking care of my children alone. My older child is 22, is a girl, and now is living in Switzerland. So, I have four children living with me, the younger has 16, and the others have 18, 19, and 21. My parents live next door, here in Amadora, if I need help, I can ask them, but I don't usually do that. I receive unemployment benefits and some social benefits for my children. Here in the neighbourhood, I've lived in 3 houses. In the first two, I lived in a room, but other families lived in the other compartments, so there was no privacy. In those two houses where I lived before, the conditions were very precarious, there were problems with humidity and poor insulation, both for the cold and for the heat. I always heard that here in the neighbourhood there were many robberies, but I think it's a little better now. Here in the neighbourhood, there are many people who cannot afford to pay their rent and there are even people sleeping on the street. The streets in the neighbourhood should be repaired, the roads are badly damaged by the rain. In recent years the heatwaves have been getting worse, I feel hotter and hotter at home in the summer. When disasters occur, such as flash floods, we know through television or even through warnings sent by mobile phone. I don't feel particularly

vulnerable in the face of extreme events, but I have some concerns about my disabled son, I think he is more at risk in the event of a disaster.

Quotes

In those two houses where I lived before, the conditions were very precarious, there were problems with humidity and poor insulation, both for the cold and for the heat.

In recent years the heatwaves have been getting worse, I feel hotter and hotter at home in the summer.

When disasters occur, such as flash floods, we know through television or even through warnings sent by mobile phone. I don't feel particularly vulnerable in the face of extreme events, but I have some concerns about my disabled son, I think he is more at risk in the event of a disaster.

Keywords

Unemployment; poverty; bad housing conditions

RL1_PT10, Portugal, Young woman precarious, working conditions about become an emigrant

Narrative

I'm Vera, 26-year-old nurse born in Guimarães. I lived in many places in my life, starting from the period I went to college in Porto. I consider that all moments of my life were phases of change, of growth, and starting to live alone was extremely enriching, made me grow a lot. After my university studies, I did a mission in São Tomé and Príncipe for a year in community development, and I think it was the experience that changed my life, and my way of being. After this, I have moved with my girlfriend to Lisbon, where I started to work as a nurse in a private hospital.

My experience in Lisbon was a bit cut off, limited because of the pandemic because the time to adapt, I lived it, without covid and then, when I finally could take advantage of it, everything closed down and for me it was just work-home/homework. After a couple of years, we left Lisbon and moved to Porto for two main reasons. On the one hand we

wanted begin an international experience (either by starting a new voluntary mission, of through an emigration process), and therefore we wanted to be closer to the family for a period. And on the other hand, we were struggling with the working conditions during covid. The workload was enormous and exhausting. We moved to Porto without work or plan. Thanks to God, to the Universe we have the opportunity to do so because at a monetary level we are minimally safe because we have family support, and we didn't have to pay rent in Porto. That makes all the difference in a decision like that. I believe that climate change is literally on our doorstep. And it's something that has been talked about for many years now, but I always think it was always talked about lightly and it was always talked about as something that is not going to happen, but it is already happening. I thought that I have never felt the impact of climate change or natural disasters, but during this interview I realised that there are already three or four events that have directly influenced my life. And this in the space of a year or two. I think the main driver of action is awareness, people being aware of what the problem is. Because if we are not aware that there is a problem, we will not act. I think the most important thing is awareness. I think this awareness has to do with the level of education, the level of education that people have, because there is a pyramid of needs and a person who is not yet stable, at a certain level, does not have the capacity to think, maybe, concerning those matters which are above in the pyramid. There are leaders of great powers who do not help in this process and end up denying scientific facts, as in this issue of changes, and this influences a whole great power of people who look to that leader as an example. There are several instruments that one can apply to protected against climate hazards, but the way they work is only for the upper middle class., because we have to make an investment first, it has to be in accordance with the rules of this program, which are extremely meticulous and extremely bureaucratic and then, if I don't follow all the rules , I'm at risk that this investment of mine could not be refunded... or if they decide to end the program, there is the risk on not being refund.

Quotes

Personally, I haven't directly felt an impactful climate change yet. But...but I feel, for example, the issue of droughts. In the summer, the water supply in the houses was decreasing. That is, the water pressure has been decreased. I notice now, with the issue of floods. All the accidents that were talked about in the news... and it was very close that I didn't catch them in Lisbon, because I lived in the area where there were the biggest floods and the most dramatic floods.

Because of this globalization and the internet, it brings us closer to other people. The problems we had on the other side of the ocean are starting to get closer. It's almost as if it had happened over there in the district next door, or over there in an area next door. We are much more aware of what is going on.

I would say no, but maybe because I'm here talking to you, I see that there are already three or four things that have directly influenced my life. And this in the space of a year or two.

It's a very big risk. Yes, and only people who have some financial stabilities are able to invest cash and then be repaid and not many families have this ability.

Keywords

Young woman, precarious, emigration

RL1_IT01, Italy, Maura strives to give prevention centre stage

Narrative

My name is Maura, and I am 29 years old. I was born in the south of Italy, then I moved to a city in the central part of the country in 2012 for studying at the University. Initially, I specialised as a radiology technician but then I graduated in construction engineering in May and obtained my professional qualification in September. Among the many possible engineering specializations. I chose this one because it seemed to me that I could make a more useful contribution to help tackle a serious national problem. I am interested in acting on what is existing to make it safer, with all the human components that this entails. I consider this as my town, and it is here that I experienced climate change in these last years and natural hazard events and their management. I carry out research activities at the university and, in particular, I deal with seismic vulnerabilities. In particular, the seismic vulnerability of school buildings. Therefore, even if earthquakes have only an indirect relationship with climate change, I am increasingly inclined to deal with them. The intensity of earthquakes and their frequency, in fact, are independent of climate change, but their effects are not. Just think of the related landslides or floods. Therefore, I am interested in all these natural hazards. This topic has always fascinated me, as I think that everyone, according to their skills, must provide their contribution to reducing these risks. We have been taught that a disaster is the product of multiple factors and, in particular, the product of the probability that a calamitous event will occur and the damage it produces. Therefore, we must work on prevention to reduce both factors. Still for this reason, in recent months, I started working in a voluntary association having 300 people in Italy. 60 are in this region, which brings together civil protection experts to try to make people more aware of these risks. In the association there are also history experts because they think it is important to enhance people's knowledge of past events. Many people, in my opinion, are not informed about the existence of these risks and should instead become aware of them. Only in this way can you protect yourself. With this association, we promote a series of awareness campaigns implemented with citizens in public places and a project implemented in schools for the prevention of seismic risk,

landslides and floods to promote, through the little ones, a culture of prevention, on how to use small precautions even in their homes. With these campaigns, I am learning a lot and I try to teach a lot. I experienced risky situations several years ago and I know how I reacted and how I would be able to react much more adequately now. When I was 5, in my region, there was a strong earthquake (5.3 Richter scale) and I remember that no one around me knew what to do and I was given contradictory indications. Also in subsequent years, I have experienced similar situations in other areas of Italy. The last one here, a few months ago, which I experienced with much greater awareness. The fear remains, but knowing how to behave led me to have a substantially different attitude in those situations. And this is what I am now trying to convey to others, especially to children. Everyone must be aware that calamitous events can happen to everyone, while many think that this is a problem that does not concern them. I have focused in particular on seismic vulnerability and seismic vulnerability of school buildings, identifying also technical and particular measures of preparedness in order to minimise the risks. And then I explain to the children and to older students too that there are ways to improve the anti-seismicity of their schools. For example, we taught children to build models of seismic isolators and then showed them how they protect the stability of buildings. Other experiments are carried out with regard to other hydrogeological risks. I myself am specializing in these other risks. The idea is to let the children and youth “touch” practical tools that protect us and therefore the importance of preparedness. Through the children, then, the aim is to sensitise parents. Once they have returned home, children are invited to check the situation of their home and the place where they live on the basis of the various precautions we have told them about. In this city (and not only) in recent years, phenomena such as tornadoes have been occurring that had never been seen in the past. Or even very strong thunderstorms that cause flooding. There is also a strong increase in temperature, with heat waves, which causes situations of strong discomfort that I had never experienced in the past. These are all situations that can be mitigated if the population is well informed. The awareness we carry out is aimed at everyone.

Cards on floods and earthquakes are also distributed explaining the behaviours to adopt during and after an event of this kind. We try to differentiate the way of explaining things according to the age groups. The reactions of the people, in the immediate term, are very positive. Some even imagine the precautions they will take on their return home. However, I am not at all sure that this has been followed up on later. Many will then have thought that there are other more urgent things to do and therefore their behaviour has not changed at all. They have a greater awareness, but then nothing changes. This is what I fear. On the other hand, I myself have had such an attitude for years. Unfortunately, many do nothing until they are in real danger. But by then, at least in part, it is too late. Based on my small capacities, I try to give more and more importance to prevention and to make others do the same. However, in my opinion, 80% then do nothing. I have also experienced it with people close to me. For example, with the 5 co-tenants who live with me. Maybe awareness grows, but nothing more. They are interested but nothing is done in terms of real prevention. However, this did not lead to any conflict with my co-tenants. Looking to the future, I believe we have arrived at a situation in which a change is needed regarding our behaviour in relation to climate change also because it is getting worse and faster. I hope it will, but I am not at all convinced that this is happening or will actually happen.

Quotes

People are not informed about natural hazards and should be aware in this regard. You have to know them and know what to do.

Everyone, according to their skills, must provide their contribution to reducing these risks.

Keywords

Education, Awareness raising, Prevention, Civil protection, Motivation

RL1_IT02, Italy, Toki is comparing natural hazards management in Italy and Japan

Narrative

My name is Toki, and I am a young Japanese woman living in central Italy, where I arrived in 2008. Previously, I lived in Japan. I have a husband and an 8-years old child at primary school. I have some difficulties speaking Italian and I do not speak English. Every year or two, I go back to Japan, but now I have not been there for almost three years. I have never experienced natural disasters in either Japan or Italy. I remember some episodes very well, but I was not there. When Fukushima occurred, I was already in Italy. Conversely, I experienced the heat wave this summer here. It has been very strong. There was also a drought and after that, there was a lot of rain. In the last years, both in Japan and Italy, disasters related to natural hazards increased. Hurricanes, storms, heavy rains, also with deaths. In Italy, State aid does not come soon. The situation is better in Japan, also in the case of earthquakes, because buildings are earthquake-resistant already from ancient times. In Japan, we have long tried to deal with the difficult environmental situation by building a system whereby, if this happens, you have to do this, if that happens, you have to do that. We have also experienced in the past much more intense events and know what must be done. Preparedness is very important. In Japan, when there is a flood, the State immediately takes care to check why it happened and immediately afterwards measures are taken to fix it. Embankments are raised or other measures are taken to prevent flooding. In Japan, we move very quickly. In Italy, I think, it is slower or maybe nothing is done. In both countries, however, they say there is a lack of money to do what is needed. In Japan, they act fast. For example, when the Fukushima disaster happened on 11 March, the government was quick enough to fix the roads, to fix the rivers, and to get life back to normal. I am not talking about nuclear power. That is

another thing. In Italy, you know it rains every year. You cannot make the rain stop. But little is done, especially in the South. In Japan, natural disaster prevention drills are conducted every year, at the level of every neighbourhood, especially for earthquakes, but not only. Also, for typhoons and other possible natural disasters. There is a specific day in the calendar, I think it is 1 September, and all schools are also involved. You know what it takes when an emergency situation arises. Rehearsals are done. People prepare materially, but also mentally. You know the situation in the various districts and in each district, you know where, in case, you have to go. You also know what to do with the elderly who may not be able to escape on their own. Civil defence teams together with the citizens. There is much more information. And then there are the products to use when there is no gas, or no water, or no electricity. You are very materially equipped. At least, that is how it was when I lived in Japan. I do not know if they continue to do that today. In Italy, this is done less because everyone thinks it is something that concerns others and not themselves. Here, people think that floods will happen elsewhere. They watch television and do not remember that it happened here. One does not think “it could happen to me”. People do not consider themselves implicated. If, on the other hand, they thought that this could happen to me, they would change their attitude.

Unfortunately, what we have done now is no longer enough, even in Japan. We are generally aware that a typhoon or something similar comes during the summer. This is normal for us. But we are too accustomed to it. Whereas instead we should start changing our behaviour to prevent these things from happening. Or at least limit them. We have to protect the environment, starting with where we throw our waste. And then, we cut down a lot of trees. That is too much. We have gone too far. Moreover, it is not enough to make decisions to protect the environment if people then do not respect those decisions. But consumerism also has to decrease. I am very environmentally aware. I no longer use chemical detergents. I do not use cosmetics. I am trying to behave more and more appropriately, even limiting my use of the washing machine, eating healthy food and using plastic as little as possible. It is very positive that now there is much more information than before. With friends, we never talk about the fact that natural disasters might happen. Instead, I have many Japanese friends who live here who stock up on food (rice, pasta, etc.) or water in preparation for possible emergency situations. Maybe some Italians do it too... maybe they too do prevention. Around me, however, there are none. Or there is little talk about it. We need to talk more about these things. Then people will be more sensitive to environmental issues. Through my son, I realised that we talk a lot about the environment and prevention at school and I realise that civil protection does a lot. It is not like it was 50 years ago. They do a lot of events to teach about the environment. It is very important. But apart from the children, parents also begin to understand and know a lot of things. This could be very effective. But who does not have children? Maybe the municipality should do events or even online initiatives. Today, however, more is being done than before. Despite what is happening, such as war and natural disasters, even in Italy, we can continue to live normally. But one must prepare oneself as much as possible. What I can do, I do. My culture has had a big impact. In Japan, there has always been a deep respect for nature. From everyone: Buddhists, Muslims, Catholics. There is a kind of Japanese religious choice in favour of the environment: Wherever there is God. But now it's different, it's not like before. My son is also sensitive to the environment because of what he does at school. He knows words like tsunami. Looking to the future, if we do

nothing now, pollution will increase, and we will not be able to eat fish. Hurricanes, heavy rains and other natural disasters will increase.

Quotes

We need much more respect for nature.... The economy has gone too far.

My son already has a preventive culture. He knows what should be done.

Keywords

Education, disasters management, preparedness, environment protection, stock up food

RL1_IT03, Italy, Carlo, an 89-year-old pensioner, trusts institutions to deal with environmental disasters

Narrative

I am Carlo and I am almost 89 years old. I am now retired but I worked as a bailiff in the court of appeal in a town in central Italy. I am originally from the south of the country, but I have lived here for 62 years after winning the competition and being transferred here.

In 1966 I experienced the flood, fortunately with light damage because I lived on the second floor and the water reached the first. Everything in the historic centre was flooded and there was great participation in the support. I regretted not being able to help enough because I was a bit shocked, but everyone did their part. In the neighbourhood, we had to roll up our sleeves to participate in the aid for what we could do as non-expert: we had to clean the streets from the mud with shovels and we went out by car to get water for drinking, cooking, etc. There were inconveniences and many suffered more than us. We were afraid it might happen again and then there were problems in everyday life: everywhere we went there were inches of slime and from where I lived you could even see dead horses. All the cars were stacked on top of each other, and my car could no longer be taken and in the end, I had to call someone to remove it and I lost it: in exchange, they gave me 100,000 lire [around 50 euros]. We were tight on supplies but lucky because we were on the second floor and my father came to visit us from the South with his car loaded with food, even though he didn't like travelling much.

My life was a bit different after the flood: I automatically saw all that mess and worried about everything for a long time. A lot has been done by the institutions, but I have often wondered what could have been done differently, what was or was not done to prevent or manage the disaster, etc.

It wasn't up to me, though. I assume that the institutions had the most responsibility. I remember that in the newspapers they were talking about a famous dam near here overflowing; perhaps something could have been done sooner instead of postponing the work. But of course, one cannot speak with hindsight ... Today they do more because the institutions are more empowered. I don't know much about environmental issues because I've done a completely different job, but I always listen to the television and talk to my daughter to catch up on what's happening in my region and elsewhere. Lately, there has been terrible flood damage in the region, and I don't know if it's because they did little and could have done more.

Today there is an environmental change, just look at the temperature: at the end of October, it was 29 degrees here. When I was young, in October it was almost the beginning of real winter. But I personally don't know if I can do anything about this change. I think it should be taken care of by those who are in charge and experts in technical things. For example, my daughter works at the Civil Defence, also dealing with environmental disasters, and I know that when she is called out for disaster relief, it takes her hours or nights.

Of course, there are also individual responsibilities to reduce pollution etc. For example, I think about the separate waste collection that I do with care with my wife at home and in the family, while outside there are many people who do not observe the rules and throw everything in the same bin or litter the streets. I don't know what institutions could do more.

From today to tomorrow you can't have an automatic change, but hopefully, it will always get better, and I have faith that the institutions know what to do with disasters. It seems to me that the situation of (managing) environmental disasters has also improved compared to the past. We also hope that countries will agree on energy policies given the current crisis and that other energy sources will be found because we, as individuals, can do nothing about it.

Quotes

I remember that I decided to accompany my father to the cathedral, naively thinking that he might like it and instead, when he saw how the situation was, he started to cry.

We must talk about it but let those who are competent intervene.

Keywords

Flood, society's involvement in aid, fear, shock and worries, institutional responsibility, keeping informed, climate change, energy crisis, waste collection

RL1_IT04, Italy, Bernardo believes in the contribution of disabled people in tackling environmental disasters

Narrative

My name is Bernardo, and I am 69 years old. I have been retired for two years and worked in a software and IT industry. In the course of my life, I lost sight first in one eye and then in the other and have been blind since 1990. I have always lived in a city in central Italy and when I was young, before I started losing my sight, I was a scout and then a volunteer in the services of municipal associations. As a result, I am very familiar with the topography and toponymy of the city and the social and health structures and organisation of the municipality. I used to volunteer in rescue associations, which in those days was a tradition for all young people in town. I still deal with social and health services both in associations for the blind and visually impaired and by collaborating with municipal and regional social and health volunteer associations for the elderly and/or disabled. I live with my wife, while my daughter lives elsewhere in the city. In the last period of absolute blindness, I always need someone to help me to carry out my daily tasks.

In 1966 I experienced the flood as a child. At the time, I was already in the scouts, so we were engaged to help people who had been left with flooded water both in their homes and workplaces. So, I already saw in my youth the scenarios that remain after a flood of that magnitude and the consequences that linger after years. There are neighbourhoods in the city that for years had scaffolding or dampness that never cleared up and in homes, and even entering shops, you could smell mould. At the time, I had no losses in my family due to the flood except for the house of a few relatives who could no longer use it. We took them in and helped with the minimal restoration of living conditions in their houses. I remember that the perception was not immediate for those who had not really been flooded, so much so that I always remember my mother grumbling at me because I wanted to go to the centre to see what had happened, and she said to me: 'Put on your good clothes, because when you go out you have to dress properly'. And instead, there were people washing their hands with wine from bottles because there was no water.

Then, having always worked in association groups, I have a fairly resilient outlook. I always try to find ways to solve the most critical issues, and above all, knowing the consequences, I have a very special focus on prevention. Others often don't understand how you always have to think the worst, when prevention means putting yourself in a position precisely to live better. I have verified this even more with absolute blindness, because knowing already what can happen and how to prevent it sets your life in such a way that you then deal with the problem when it comes without stress and without the disorientation that could upset you. This also means being able to organise one's life in an

orderly way, and blind people in particular are an example of order and discipline, both in terms of organising spaces and paying attention to possible dangers. Even in the workplace, in the warehouse, this served to influence my colleagues in a positive sense: I needed to move between shelves and work benches, and, with my observations, some things were changed and suspended loads or protruding elements or stumbling blocks were eliminated. It came down to the notion that if things were built or adapted as well as possible so that I didn't take risks, everyone would live better, because injuries are unpredictable, but they can be prevented if you don't create the conditions for them to occur. The heritage and experience of people with disabilities should teach to believe in one's own possibilities and rely on oneself without being afraid to ask for help if some things cannot be done alone. This approach helps to deal with unforeseen situations such as a scooter or an electric car passing by, and you don't hear them because they are silent. So, even when you think you are in a safe condition, there is always the unexpected that is not calculated. Society is born in the young, so it is the school and other educational agencies that must present models of behaviour that children do not currently have. At school, there should be the specific subject of sustainable behaviour imposed precisely as necessary for society. There should be an awareness that everyone has to make their own contribution of knowledge but also of concrete actions, starting for example with the use of single-use plastic. Even if the feeling is that individual contributions fail to affect the whole of reality, because many do not contribute, we must insist on the discourse of reuse and non-waste of food and materials. Other experiences with climate change concern the seasons, which no longer exist. The fruits of the soil are available every month of the year and even temperature is now an uncontrollable element. The change is real, and we no longer know whether we will be able to slow down this change. I am worried about environmental disasters because the trend is more and more pronounced, with more and more concentrated events of ever-increasing power. Certainly, the land is not built to withstand these extreme events, and above all I worry about the next generations, because either cities are rebuilt from the ground up taking these aspects into account, or it will always be a cry over what has been lost. For example, the reconstruction of earthquake centres is a bit of a contradiction in the sense that it makes no sense to rebuild in the same place without more complex planning just because the community has to maintain what it had before. You have to be ready for change because keeping what it was leads to experiencing again what happened. Today, communication is accessible, so what used not to happen with us we see happening all the time in other countries such as tornadoes or tsunamis. It can always happen here in Italy too.

Quotes

There are wounds after years that are no longer visible, but they remain in the testimonies and, for instance, even in the plaques that testify where the water level in the town reached.

There are personal habits that have to be trained and, in this case, having a disability trains you to be able to recognise certain signs and be better prepared than others.

We must be aware that nature always wins out over us. We must not be conceited, but understand that events can happen, and the only way is to study, educate and prevent the most serious consequences. Individually, we do not perceive the change that is possible as a community.

Blind persons already know [the dangers of the road], because they know their way, and they avoid them by moving gently, without being suddenly surprised.

Keywords

Prevention, long-term consequences, discipline, resilience, learning from disabled people, concrete actions needed, the power of nature, educating young people

RL1_IT05, Italy, Ahmed, Tunisian by birth, loves helping and raising awareness about climate change

Narrative

I am Ahmed, I am 41 and I am Tunisian. I came here to Italy when I was 17. I studied and then I started working. For many years now I have been working as a tow truck driver for the municipality, doing roadside assistance and support in the city. I live with my partner, and I hope to get married in January. After my job, for the past three years I have been volunteering with the civil defence because I feel I contribute more to my community in the city I love and where I live. I feel more Italian than Tunisian and here the people I hang out with are all Italian, like my close friends or my partner. Although I am a practising Muslim and attend the mosque, I don't spend time with the Tunisian community. I think climate change affects everything: people's health, character, physical, moral and even social life. For example, it is now 20 degrees instead of the 6 degrees it should be, and this affects both human and animal life and nature in general, such as plants or rivers that are dry. This also affects our food because instead of getting seasonal things we find ourselves importing food from abroad. It's a whole chain that is also connected between countries around the world. I am worried about the situation also because I like cold weather and when it rains. Drought means lack of water which results in hunger and therefore price rises. This leads us to transport things from other places and thus eat food out of season. Health also suffers: we need the sun but also the cold in my opinion. When the earth is completely dry and a downpour comes, everything floods in the cities and we have experienced these events before. Lately, in the municipalities around the city, there have

also been earthquakes, and that too, in my opinion, has to do with climate change. I am scared and afraid. During floods or earthquakes, as has already happened, in addition to human losses, you can lose property. I hope none of this happens. I witnessed an earthquake here and the river flooding in nearby areas. I saw the houses full of water, especially on the ground floors and in the garages, and people who could not get out or there waiting for help on the terraces or on the upper floors. Half the town was flooded, and I was one of the helpers. In the end, I put an elderly lady who couldn't walk on my shoulders and pulled her out of the house with water up to above my waist because the boat wasn't coming. It's very sad to see these scenes, for those who help and for those who suffer, even for the animals who don't know how to deal with disasters. In the civil defence we try to help in all disasters, and it is a source of pride to be part of this family. For example, we helped during the COVID crisis by bringing material to people who needed it.

I personally, coming from Tunisia, have seen houses full of water already after two millimetres of rain. My family home is luckily located in a high spot so when it rains we hardly suffer anything. Anyway, I already had an idea of what could happen, and here I always thought that if I took a house I would take it in a spot far from the bottom, from a river, or where there is a collection of water. This is the only preparation one can decide to do because when you're near these points you can't do anything else. We have seen that equipping oneself with pumps to drain the water or making margins or retaining walls for the river, as in areas nearby, where the river overflowed, is not much use.

Most people think for themselves and are often happy with the heat without thinking about the foods that could no longer be eaten such as olives, grapes, and therefore wine. Last year some areas of the region really suffered from the lack of olives due to the lack of rain. Luckily my circle of acquaintances is on the same wavelength as I am, outside many are uncaring.

Many talk about eliminating pollution, but we need alternatives. There are incentives to use electric vehicles, to use bicycles by creating cycle paths etc., but there are still diesel boilers and petrol cars or factories that pollute. It takes time and money to change. I think you have to change yourself first to make others change. The institution gives you the input but it should be a worldwide thing not just a single municipality or country. All countries should change in order to have real change: the earth is a ball, I can't clean up here to dirty the other side. There are alternatives, research and results to have zero emissions but they should be encouraged. We have to leave something good for the next generations: we make the launch, they will reap the benefits. People should be sensitised and given the opportunity to go that route. There are major costs for individuals to reduce emissions, transform their house or get a suitable vehicle, and salaries don't allow it. The crisis is there, and many can't afford to change and invest in an electric car, for example I couldn't. Factories should make electric cars accessible to everyone and electric charges should be more present. And then information should be simplified for everyone to understand the seriousness of the situation and provide a solution. When I was 15 years' old nobody talked about all this, it's only in the last 25 years that people have started to inform themselves on TV, the internet, etc., even about disasters in other countries or the war that is affecting this economic and climate crisis. Those who don't have these problems must help those who have.

Quotes

I'm one of the few who say that, but I like real seasons at the right times and it hasn't been like that for years.

I love helping others without getting anything in return.

People only realise the gravity of the situation when it comes to their own consumption.

Keywords

Community service/contribution, multidimensionality of climate change consequences, connections of global factors, fears, being prepared, thinking only of one's own interests, finding alternatives accessible to all, changing oneself, raising awareness

RL1_IT06, Italy, Lucia takes small steps to prevent environmental disasters

Narrative

I am Lucia and I am 55 years old. I was born and raised in this city, in the central part of Italy, and I work for the Ministry of Defence. Among other things, I deal with cartography. I live in a house in the countryside on the outskirts of the city with my husband and two cats. I have been volunteering since 1987, first in the health service and then in civil protection since 1990. With them, I have dealt with various emergencies such as earthquakes, floods and other problems related to the great rains. Having lived here all my life, I have memories of the changes in the rainfall. I remember in March/April, on my mother's terrace, these waves of rain that today are random, unfortunately, even at times when there shouldn't be any. Surely this is an effect of climate change, like winters that are less cold: there are few snowfalls and when it snows, it snows too much. One year, a snowfall here blocked the whole of Italy, dividing it in two because the trains could no longer pass on the tracks. Another event I remember is the one on 1 August 2015, when half of the city was hit by a whirlwind-type windstorm on the river, which devastated the whole south-eastern part of the city. There was this temperature change so that this corridor of wind came up the river and knocked trees to the ground and took the roof off the houses. It was really very impressive because out of nowhere half the city didn't realise what was happening, while the other half was completely flooded. On that occasion, the intervention as a volunteer within the civil defence was affected because our

garage got flooded so in order to intervene for others, we had to work for ourselves first, saving things from the water. After that, I started being afraid of the wind, so I stay away from roofs and trees. I also did some shovelling and emptying work with water pumps when there were the last floods in the region that were not foreseeable. It was a big job to get the mud out. And then there are often these whirlwinds on the coast that weren't there before. Drought is also a big problem. This summer, for the first time, I found myself having to think about saving water. So we put a watering can in the shower so that the first water before it gets hot goes there and is not lost because we can use it to water the plants in the garden.

I don't remember why I started volunteering in my twenties: maybe when you're young there's the fact that you feel like a superhero, then when you're 55 you realise that you're just like everyone else. At the beginning, I didn't volunteer for environmental disasters, also because at the local level, there weren't many emergencies. Nowadays, every time it rains, we're called to some emergency, maybe because they've done the sewers wrong or because it rains in a different way. Volunteering teaches you self-protection as well as protection towards others. I receive weather warnings as a volunteer and I already know what to do even if sometimes, in front of an earthquake, you feel helpless. The obstacles to volunteering are the little time after work and the fact that there are things too big for us. I can't contrast environmental disasters except for small things like using the car or moped as little as possible, using the bicycle, walking, keeping the heating very low, no air conditioning, etc. If everyone did it, the problems would be less, but there are things that are bigger than us. The responsibility is individual, because we all have to do things right and commit ourselves, but also at an institutional and political level, because the government should tell you what to do. If we all had more conscience it would be easier for the institutions too. This thinking: 'why I have to do it if others don't do it?' leads to nobody doing it. But the government should make things easier for individuals because on a normal salary many people cannot afford to install solar panels or buy an electric car despite the incentives. Even many 1950s mansions cannot cope with the change.

My circle of friends, family and acquaintances are all more or less aligned on what to do. Many of us have a garden and a small vegetable garden and we cycle to work when we can. I grew up with a love of nature instilled by my family. By volunteering I have learnt to see things from both sides, as a victim and a rescuer: I pay more attention to safety and prevention. For example, I don't throw litter on the ground because I know it will end up in my drains or I avoid littering cavities. There isn't much environmental awareness or attention to not littering, but I don't think punishments will help. Maybe seeing so many disasters will change people's behaviour, but I don't know. I don't even know if changing our behaviour will actually lead to the reversal of the climate change trend because it's been too few years since the subject has come up. I am hopeful for people's change in the future, but I am concerned about both environmental issues and personal discomfort when it rains heavily, for example. The energy crisis worries me especially because I cook with gas and I'm afraid that they take it away.

Quotes



We noticed that with three showers you can save 12 litres of water and I regretted not having done it earlier.

I can try to do these things in my small world, but in the big one, it is too complicated.

Institutions are made by people, but the state should help us financially.

Keywords

Volunteering, changes in rainfall and wind, fear, superhero attitude, (self)protection and prevention, sustainable individual behaviour, request for state support, nature-loving education

RL1_IT07, Italy, Aldo experienced natural hazards throughout his life and committed to volunteering

Narrative

I am Aldo and I am 82 years old. I am living in this city since 1968 where I worked at the national electric company, at the legal office. Previously, I lived in the southern part of the region. I am a graduate in Law. Now I am retired since 2000. I was married, but since 2018 I am a widower. My wife taught Latin and Greek in high school. I have two sons. I am passionate about the sea, and I had a boat. Part of my family is living in an island not far from here. I am a hunter and I have two rifles. But now I don't go hunting anymore. Now I have a full respect for the animals. And even when I was a hunter, I was paying attention to the animals I shot at. For example, avoiding females, as they must procreate. From when I retired in 2000 until 2018 when my wife died, I was engaged as a volunteer at the Misericordia in town. I am still a Misericordia associate, but I am doing nothing.

I experienced a huge flood event. In 1966 I did not live here, but floods happened also where I lived, in a residential area, where the local river overflowed, At that time, I was a teacher. Together with others, all volunteers, we worked hard to bring food and clothes to rural people who had remained isolated in the countryside. We also cleaned shops and other things that all the young people did on that occasion. All my friends helped a lot. Civic engagement was very important. I also collaborated with the Bishop of the town by distributing packages of food to people in need. I volunteered, but not so long, because then I started teaching again. I remember another major flood of the river at the end of the sixties due to a problem with the dams. Several buildings were submerged. I

remember it well. All electric technicians and workers were involved. There were complaints. But it turned out well. Today the rivers have been fully settled and we should no longer run the risk of similar floods. Then I also experienced small frequent floods caused by the flooding of the drains, as proper maintenance is not done. They are clogged. There are also plants that have grown there. In recent years, there were also strong winds that uncovered the roofs of the houses in the neighbourhood where I live, built years earlier. A pine also fell over my house. I also experienced the fires that destroyed the surroundings of my house. The whole pine forest was burnt which, after a few years is rising again. The same happened on the mountains, where I have another house. All this by looking only at things close to us. But it happens all over the world. I also experienced an earthquake in 1969. People looked worried at the windows. I went under the door jamb. Then the shaking subsided. But I felt like I was flying, the shock had been so strong. These were old houses. There was another earthquake here a few years ago. I felt it. But absolutely nothing happened. The chandeliers have just moved. This is an anti-seismic house. The city and the coast are beautiful and when I look at them, I wonder why human beings have to destroy these beautiful things created by God. But God also gave man the free will that allowed him to progress. Man, today, lacks the virtue of respecting nature and the world in which you live. There is no respect for the sea where I find abandoned plastic bags, as well as noise pollution. I therefore very much appreciate the volunteers who clean the beaches. Education is missing. The state does not care enough for the environment. Nature rebels to human beings' negligence. For some years now, even here, we have realised that there are no more seasons. There are also landslides. In many countries, the ocean is corroding the beach which becomes desert. Progress, even if it is beautiful, has had no mercy on nature. But I believe that having given up nuclear power was a huge mistake, also because around us, we have all countries that use it. Environmental culture lacks, also because there is no more civic education and therefore, we lack a world vision.

In general, too much has been thought about making a profit, without thinking that the gain could have been made the same, but also safeguarding the environment. I often talk to colleagues and friends about these issues. There are those who argue that it is the fault of the state, those who say that it is the fault of the people, there's no agreement. I often discuss these things even with my twin brother who is a strong ecologist. I also talk about it with the other people who live in my building when we meet down the street. Here, too, opinions differ. Luckily, there are now people who deal with it a lot like that young Swedish ecologist. But it is already late. However, people tend to inform themselves about these problems in a superficial way, ignoring the causes, consequences, related factors, etc. You get used to things. Also, because everyone has so many problems. And then people only care about work, money and fun. Everything else slips away. Looking to the future, I have little hope. I think that, in relation to climate change, since everyone also has their own interests, things will get worse. However, there are signs (for example, renewable energies are very widespread in some regions of the world) that can lead to hope. And it's something that for some of us comes from far away ... Ever since the national electric company worked on geothermal energy a lot of years ago. I was there. And in this regard, since then, there have been useless controversies by those who criticise geothermal implants. In any case, in a framework that I consider negative, the widespread of renewable energy gives hope for the future.

Quotes

If God has given us such a splendid creation, how can man afford to destroy it?

Human neglect is at the root of climate change.

We need to think about future generations.

Keywords

Flooding, volunteering, respecting nature, education, renewable energy

RL1_IT08, Italy, Mohamed has no hope for the future and thinks that no improvement is possible

Narrative

I am Mohamed. I am Tunisian. I am 56 years old. I have been living in Italy for the last 31 years. I was for two years in a city in the north of Italy and then I came here in central Italy in 1993. I have been sleeping on the street for the last 3 years and a half and I do cleaning work in a shop and at the market where I clean the warehouse and the butchery. It happens that I finish work even at 11 pm or midnight. I have been a non-regular migrant since 2007 as I no longer have a residence permit. Previously I was in prison for a few years because of some of my compatriots and my residence permit was revoked. I was not repatriated, but not because I objected but simply because this did not happen. Every so, it often happens that the police or the carabinieri stop me on the street. But nothing happens. Since I have been in prison, I can't even sleep at the public hotel, but I can come here to Caritas to eat. When it opens in early December, I will go to sleep in the "cold emergency". Always like this every year: 4 months in the cold emergency and 8 months in the street. I have a place where I can take a shower three times a week. On the street, I live under a shed without a bed. I sleep on the floor on two doormats and have a blanket. I am not married. My family members are all in Tunisia. I have no children. I had two cohabitants here in Italy, one for a few months and a second for six years. In Tunisia I had studied. I learned the Italian language along the way. I also speak French and Arabic and a little English too. Now I only have relationships with 2 or 3 friends. Not more. No relations with my compatriots. They sent me to prison, and I avoid them. I have been

through a lot of trouble. That is enough now. Moreover, the Tunisian community is small. I have never returned to Tunisia since 2001. Two of my family members were in Italy between 2001 and 2004 and then they left. I never experienced natural hazards such as flood, heat waves or others in Tunisia or in Italy and I am convinced that climate change, at least here, depends on the high number of cars. Particularly in the centre of the city, vehicle circulation should be restricted. I am not interested in these issues. I have my own problems and I can't take care of other people's problems. Even if I want to, I can't help. I do not think about these things. And the people I talk to are not interested in these things either. Here in Italy, I do not consider these events. But when the Tsunami occurred in Thailand in 2004, I made a donation of two euros with my mobile phone. I knew what that meant. Here, the climate does not bother me at all. It is other human beings who bother me, living in the street. For example, the drunken American tourists who, during the summer, pass by where I sleep. I can't sleep until 2 in the morning, and I have to get up at 6 in the morning. All of this is physically and mentally unsustainable. I cannot take it anymore. I do not trust in the future. For me and for those like me future entails only misery. Climate change will get worse in my opinion. The more the population increases, the more the climate rebels. There will be more smog. There can be no improvement as long as trees continue to be cut down.

Quotes

I do not see anything in the future. I see only misery. It is the little fish that pay for everyone.

I have to deal with what will happen to me tomorrow. I don't have time to think about anything else.

Keywords

Misery, cold weather emergency, migration, hopelessness, isolation

RL1_IT09, Italy, Lorenza would like people to remember the terrible flood of 1966

Narrative



I am Lorenza, I am 79 years old. Now I am retired. I have an autoimmune disease that makes it difficult for me to move so I live with my daughter-in-law and my son. I am living in this city since forever.

I was a teacher and now I am retired. I fully experienced the flood in 1966. It was Sunday, November 4th. At first, some people said that water had entered their bathroom. Then we went on quietly to the Mass and then there was a little water in the street. We were told that the waterworks had broken down. I phoned my mother-in-law who lived in the centre of the city and was alarmed: water had already invaded the ground floor, although they had closed the front door and the water had already started to carry away the cars. Then the communication fell. Meanwhile, it continued to rain heavily. In a few minutes, the water overtook the bus poles. Even in my neighbourhood, the families who lived in the sub-basements had their houses flooded with water. We tried to help them save as much as we could (furniture, TV set, etc.). Meanwhile, all the manholes overflowed. People started rafts, but the roads were also downhill. Two guys, in front of my eyes, went crashing into the gate of a factory. They hooked themselves to the gate bars.

In the meantime, ropes were made with sheets and both guys were saved. Then darkness came. The night was a nightmare with all the people calling. A hell of a thing. Then, at around 3:30 a.m. someone started saying "it goes down." We started to breathe again. When daylight came, we could see everything passing through the streets that had become rivers: cars, carboys, baskets of stuff, all in a very strong current. Then the amphibious vehicles arrived. Afterwards, the water started to drop for real, but there was mud and for months people very often lived without water and/or electricity, you had to get the water off the truck, while maybe others had water and we went to wash at their house. Normalcy returned in April 1967. During these six months, there was an excellent spirit of collaboration among all the citizens. We went to help the shops to rearrange what was possible to recover. Also going to the centre where, however, in the shops we were forced to throw away almost everything. We were a large group made up of soldiers and volunteers. There was a special focus on helping weaker people. The solidarity was great. And people helped and housed those who had lost everything. I did that myself, living on the second floor and I hosted those on the ground floor for a long time. The school was closed until the beginning of December. Then, school reopened but it took a few months to get back to normal. They said there were no deaths, but it is known that some died instead. This tragedy, however, was taken by people in a very sporty way without provoking lasting trauma. It must also be remembered that in some parts of the city the water has hardly produced any effect. Some inhabitants of those areas considered the inhabitants of the flooded areas as exaggerated. At the time, no one had climate change in mind and therefore no one made this connection and moreover, climate change probably had little to do with it, while it is much more relevant in more recent events. I would say that the 1966 flood has been archived and it had no effects, even for my generation that experienced it, on the way we perceive environmental risks today. At the time, people determined that the flood was caused by the dam opening too much. Then, people got involved in the recovery process. A lot of work has been done, but we have never thought about it anymore. There is no more talk of that flood. And very little has been said about it in the last few decades. I think the flood of 1966 is remembered much more by those who came to help us, than by us.

When it rains a lot today, the 1966 flood comes to mind, but then I immediately discard that thought by telling myself that that flood was something else, also because we feel that today we are equipped. Here, we do not consider the 1966 flooding and his management as a lesson learned that can be useful today. In my opinion, this story does not in any way lead the citizens to be more involved in risk/flood management, even at the level of preparedness, “also because the mistakes are always made by others.” Perhaps, what has remained rooted at least in some people is the great experience of solidarity that we have experienced. But not in all, also because many persons are very individualistic. In my opinion there has not been a generation transfer of the 1966 flood experience. We discuss these things related to climate change, for example in the condominium with the proposal of lowering central heating by one and a half degrees. Of course, the proposal was not accepted, with many justifications proposed by various people, also because we do not have the appropriate information. So, we are constrained in a dark situation. There has been a great drought, but you can tell yourself that the same drought had been there 9 years ago. A situation is always softened by the media. And therefore, the truth is not recognised. There is mistrust in forecasting systems. If you knew more, you might be more aware. In other cases, the lack of information is accompanied by other difficulties, as it has happened in my daughter’s apartment building. They discussed the hypothesis of installing solar panels, but the municipality blocked them due to the environmental impact. In the end, it is all a jungle, and one is disoriented. There is no certainty. Broadly speaking, in my family, with neighbours, we often discuss climate change, but in an inconclusive way. However, I repeat, this is also due to a notable lack of information and clarity. It is not known what the real effects of adopting specific climate change mitigation measures would be, while the costs are known. And we are therefore led to say no. In our small way, however, we do our best. This also stems from the fact that in my family great importance has always been given to the environment. But there is less and less trust on how people is dealing with climate. Looking ahead, I see the future as negative. I know that this summer’s heat wave is connected to climate change. Others know it too, but many others don’t think about it. Indeed, maybe they are happy and turn up the air conditioner. There is no willingness to change behaviours, but again, this is due to a lack of clarity and reliable information. The nuclear debate has also contributed to increasing confusion. Why have we not nuclear energy, while the countries around us exploit it and we are supposed to have the possible negative effects in case of disaster? Perhaps, it would have been much better to keep the nuclear power plants in Italy too.

Quotes

The flooding in 1966 did not traumatise us.

In a few decades, you are the first person, who asks me about the 1966 flood and to whom I told how I experienced it.

Here, we do not consider the 1966 flooding and his management as a lesson learned that can be useful today.

Keywords

Flooding, solidarity, collaboration, no generational transfer, lack of clarity and information

RL1_IT10, Italy, Roberto, a senior volunteer, collaborates with the civil protection for flood management

Narrative

I am Roberto, I am 73 years old. I am a volunteer working in an association cooperating with the civil protection. My association also takes care of many other things, such as ambulance service, but this is my task instead. A youth volunteer is cooperating with me. We are doing a lot of awareness-raising activities, and we organise also drills with people (also in the area of the river), as well as river monitoring. I am a volunteer in civil protection also because during my professional life I worked with regional and local authorities having a lot of contacts with people. Right before I retired, I specialised in hydraulics issues and carried out small hydraulic works at my home.

I am living in the territorial area of a river that this summer (August) flooded at the border of larger municipalities. The river floods more frequently close to the city and people are protected with bulkheads that allow them to save their properties and their belongings. This year, however, the river flooded in another area where there had been in the past only very small flooding, almost without consequence (the last important event was in 1966) and took almost everyone by surprise. Many premises, especially the basement ones, were flooded and damaged and furniture, appliances, televisions, etc. had to be thrown away. This disaster is now complicated by the fact that most of these basements were supposed to be used, according to the law, as garages or cellars, while, in reality, they were used as apartments or even as meeting places for parties. And therefore, now the owners cannot ask for any refund because the real use was abusive. Many homes are still uninhabitable, and people have not yet been able to return to them. Eight dwellings were heavily affected. Others were partially damaged. From such dwellings, quintals of mote as well as household goods - refrigerators, home appliances, bathroom fixtures, furniture, etc. - were pulled out. Walls, gates, etc. were destroyed. Some people have even lost cars. A few older people expected such an event. Most people, however, were unprepared. There was little anger, though, given the problem of false declarations of use. Here, we have a system for constantly checking the river levels in many parts of the city. And we know when one or more levels become problematic. And when it happens, our system is not reliable enough and we need to check with our eyes what is the situation, also many times a day. And this is what, as a volunteer, I do for the

river, especially since it is a torrential watercourse. The water level may rise by a meter in a quarter of an hour and then the river overflows and causes damage. The technical instrumentation is not sufficient to monitor the streams, despite having historical data (the river overflows on average every seven/seven and a half years). Volunteers' monitoring of the river - that I do - allow us to alarm the hydrology officers, who, however, are fewer and fewer as they retire and are not replaced). Thanks to the monitoring, I also report situations of clogging of vegetation or others that could cause flooding. In these cases, the "Consorzio di bonifica" (water reclamation consortium) must intervene. In the case of the flooding last August, the big problem was the lack of expansion tanks that are supposed to protect the territory. The "Consorzio di bonifica" should be in charge to build these tanks as well as cleaning the river. This would have prevented this disaster. Problems are also due to the fact that the hills are not cultivated and therefore larger and larger masses of water will flow in. Moreover, there is a large number of houses that have been built on this plain and could be affected.

The private sector must also cooperate. People must be educated. Walls have to be built, ditches need to be dug and further hydraulic works should be implemented by people. If not, we will have further disasters. Every rain is making the situation worse. However, there are many people who do not want to spend money. And people no longer know how to do the necessary (hydraulic) work on their own. especially young people. It must be said that in the 1990s a very good job was done by the public authorities in building lakes, which protect the city but not yet sufficiently the hills. This year people have been very alarmed about the flooding, but the interventions to be done are onerous. A major incentive has to be given to individuals to implement works (50%). However, there is the problem of false declaration of use and therefore most people will receive nothing. People are aware of climate change, but most of them do nothing. They do not react. Moreover, there are a lot of bureaucratic issues that represent further barriers for the few people who would like to do something. Authorisations to be requested, etc. Information is not enough. People will only move if they understand that there are also financial savings, as it is, for example, with building cesspools. While on disposable sumps people still hesitate. This is a problem as some water works need the input of more people. People live very much by the day. However, whenever there is a water bomb, people take a step forward. That said, people's behaviour affects the situation only marginally. Above all, public interventions are needed and have been overdue for years. There is not enough civil defence culture among public officials yet.

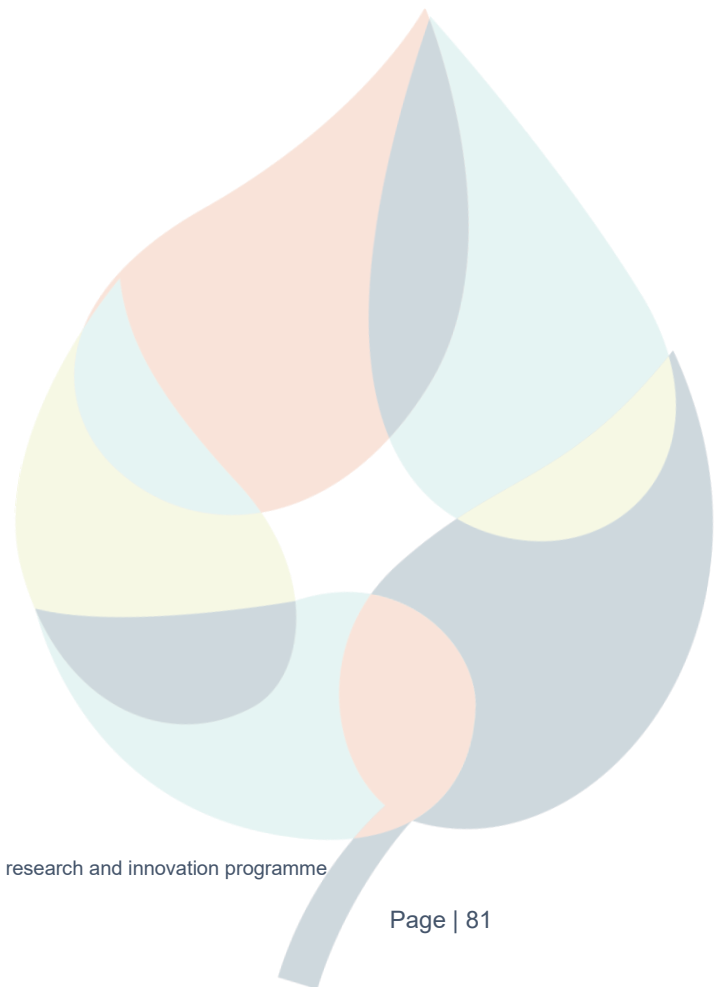
Quotes

The in-person monitoring of the river that I carry out allows me to alarm the competent services.

There is not a sufficient civil protection culture in the public sector.

Keywords

Volunteerism, awareness raising, flooding, disaster, citizens' monitoring, bureaucracy



Research Line 2: Biodiversity and land use restrictions

RL2_BU01, Bulgaria, Small scale tourism with saving the nature from litter and investors

Narrative

My name is Minna, I am 53 years old. My daughter is 20 years old and lives with me in Sofia, I am a widow and have been living with a new partner for 3 years. I grew up with my mother in a small town, then I was in boarding school of art. I am an artist and I always have work, but my commissions change a lot. When I have enough money, I go camping with friends to the sea in the summer, actually always without a partner. We are a group of friends, and we met in Sofia at yoga or meditation classes. Now everyone lives somewhere else, with my friends we only see each other once or twice a year. Nature is important to us, we want to experience it intensively together. I only go to nature with people who also love it and don't complain about everything.

We know that camping is not really legal at our favourite place, a forest area by the sea. There have already been attempts to drive away the many campers in the forest. Otherwise, we can't imagine a holiday together and there is no other way financially. Often hundreds of people camp here, but no one has ever counted them. It is actually a mixture of recreation and occupation of the place when we camp by the sea. We protect this place in nature by our presence, because in the past there were always attempts to build up the coast at this place with hotels. Fortunately, there is still no paved road to the coast, it is all really improvised when you are there. I learn a lot about protests against illegal development plans on the Black Sea from my active friends. There are important groups on Facebook that provide good information on the topic. When there are protests, there are more reports in the social media to call people to demonstrate in Sofia. People who only watch TV don't get any information. When I was a child, my grandfather showed me nature in his garden on the coast, which is also the nature I am still looking for today. This experience has determined my life. I learned the most about nature because I had experiences there myself. Knowledge and education, schooling, are also important for understanding nature. I learned how to bivouac outdoors in nature from my friends, you can't learn that at school. My daughter loves nature, I passed that on to her. Last year I looked after a child, there was a beautiful forest and we were always outdoors. I taught the child a lot.

Here in Bulgaria there is a problem with plastic waste. It is everywhere in the open. When I see litter, I take it away, otherwise nothing changes. I can't understand it when

others say, “All those who litter here should collect their own rubbish, it’s not my business.” That just doesn’t work. It’s a matter of attitude, people’s mentality can hardly be changed. There are also rubbish collection campaigns, which set important signals for people who hardly think about rubbish. The next generation, our children, also have to learn that you can’t just throw rubbish away in nature. I’m not entirely sure, but in the villages I have the impression that less attention is paid to litter than in the city. But self-responsibility is the same for everyone, whether in the city or in the countryside. When you travel by train, you see the many places in nature where just any crap, rubbish is thrown down, that irritates me a lot. People know that they live 5 metres away, but they still throw everything away. Even at my favourite place on the coast, there are different mentalities. Often those who come here for a night or a day just throw their rubbish into the nature. I think that everyone who comes should take their rubbish back with them, and the way they behave is also important. Making disrespectful noise and not respecting the nature you come here for is not acceptable. My friends often stay on site for a whole month, there is also a hole for excrement, you try to leave little traces in nature. We then collect the rubbish that others intentionally or unintentionally forget. On our beach you don’t see any plastic bottles, we have cleaned everything.

I have been thinking about whether it is good that people should have access to places in nature that are worth protecting. The small beaches on the Black Sea, where people set up their tents, I don’t think they are of global importance for nature conservation, it doesn’t matter if a few people gather there.

Nature should also be protected, where it is worth protecting, man should not intervene in such a way. It is very important to me that these places exist. Lighting fires is a question that has to be asked. Those who stay longer should also pay attention to the wood they collect, the dead wood is also important for nature. I have seen people betting on who will make the biggest fire. There should be sanctions if you don’t follow the basic rules, and the rules should be clear.

There is a conflict, there are also many people who would like to exploit their land and build hotels. But the result would be a place that no one would like any more. It is undisputed that there are such threats in many places by the sea. The appetite is big, a lot of money could be made here. Even in the mountains, where you can cut down trees, there are financial interests because there is money to be made.

Fewer and fewer tourists like the huge and overcrowded tourist complexes, which then remain empty. At the same time, there is a great appetite for exploiting the last natural or near-natural places. Humans need to think about how they treat nature and how much they exploit nature. At the very least, it would be better if there were a camping site or something similar where there is a protected reserve nearby. At least it is better than a tourist complex with hotels. What is important to me is that the public administration becomes active on issues such as nature conservation. So far, however, I see the opposite in Bulgaria. The people who are responsible for nature in the administration must become more active. I don’t have the training for that. Anyone can inform the public administration if there is a violation of the law or a chance to improve the situation without spending a lot of money. We all like to tell people in a pub what is bothering us, when talking to friends, we complain. Hardly any of us call the people in charge and tell them what is not working well. In the past, there have been threats against nature conservationists who have campaigned for the preservation of various places in nature, but also criticism of state institutions. I have heard of death threats being made against

conservationists. I think there is a conflict between those who have power and can demonstrate it and those who want to protect nature. The conflict is being played out on a different level, people are not setting tents on fire now, that only happened in the past. I think there is a constant conflict between people who are a kind of mafia, who have more money. They can influence the administration with money and exploit the last pieces of nature. I think there needs to be a lot of change in our society.

Quotes

I love the birds, but sometimes the hunters go for their trophies, I don't think that's right. Fishermen with big boats do the same thing, they do their work not only to feed their families, but they try to earn a lot of money and want to become rich.

I think there needs to be a lot of change in our society. I have heard of death threats being made against nature conservationists. There have been threats against conservationists who have worked to preserve different places in nature, there has also been criticism of state institutions.

I don't know, I think there is a conflict between those who have power and can demonstrate it and those who want to protect nature. The conflict is carried out on a different level, people don't set tents on fire now, but that happened in the past. We like to tell what moves us in a pub, when talking to friends, that's when we complain. Hardly any of us call the people in charge and tell them what is not working well. Instead of giving feedback to the appropriate decision-makers, we remain silent.

Keywords

Rubbish, role of the administration, protest movement nature conservation, private profit and nature, environmentally friendly tourism, knowledge about nature

RL2_BU02, Bulgaria, My tradition of visiting nature, recreation and the nowadays obstacles

Narrative



My name is Raina, I am 48 and I live in Sofia with my 12-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son. I am divorced and as a drawing teacher and painter I have a small income. I live in a flat that my grandparents own, somehow the money works out, we are very frugal and don't have big demands. My grandfather was a well-known painter in a village that everyone knows because the place has historical significance for our country. Our family has a tradition of going out into nature, it's been passed down through generations. A person who is trained from an early age to go into nature thinks differently. When you go to the mountain with the children, I don't think about anything, it relaxes me, it's the most beautiful thing and we also get rid of our inner conflicts. It's the place where we exchange our thoughts and finally have time for each other.

My grandfather was an artist in a village in the Balkan Mountains and much of our family has its origins there. All artists have a special relationship with nature. The connection with nature is very important to me as a person. My grandfather helped to build a mountain hut and my mother was also involved. As children we often went to the Vitosha Mountains, we also learned to ski. It was easy to get up the mountain. Until a few years ago there was a lift that was old, but it always got us up the mountain for little money. Now it has been closed down and you can only use the expensive lift at another place, which is far away from us. I can't afford to teach my children to ski, it's just too expensive. My son missed going to the mountains, but now he is 15 years old and he organises his own trips to the mountains near Sofia. Somehow he manages, he carries on our family tradition.

People are forced to organise their recreation in a place that is 60 km or more away. There is then an expensive tourist infrastructure such as hotels, lifts and a few mountain huts that are affordable. There are also nature reserves that I would like to see, for example Sreberna on the Danube or the mountains in the neighbouring countries. I can't go there, it's too far and expensive and I'm afraid to go alone.

In the summer, if we can somehow manage it, we all go wild camping for a few weeks to the sea with my friends and sisters. I paint in the forest during the day. Before we had children, we often went to the cliffs in the north, but now we all go to an area with a sandy beach because it's less dangerous. There is no infrastructure there at all and when it rains you have to wait until the roads are dry again, there is no road connection. I hope that this beach will not be built up like many others, you can see how they are building everywhere. There are few places that you can just use, you can't block people's access like they have tried to do at other places by the sea. The place attracts special people who are very mindful of nature. There is also a social life on the beach that you can't find in the city. People talk to each other in the evenings, there are friendships and groups that have known each other for years. You go from one to the other, friendships develop. For me personally, this is an experience of freedom, you can invite whoever you want, anyone can come. That's not possible at other resorts.

If areas are protected in nature, then that makes sense. Otherwise, everything is built up with hotels or other infrastructure. It is also protected so that people can go there and see the special features, you can't lock people out, then the place becomes worthless for people. People today are divided into separate subcultures. In the villages there is a rather "simple culture" that does not respect nature. People live one hand far from nature, but nature is not important. The older generation lived with nature, you depended on it if you grew some vegetables in a small garden. The younger generation doesn't appreciate that and almost all of them don't want to deal with nature. The young generation doesn't

touch anything in the garden. The youth in the small town where my family comes from just want to listen to music or play electronic games. Some live in a small town and dream of urban life, first the next bigger town, then the next city. But above all, people don't want to live in simple circumstances anymore. But there are also great exceptions who have found their niche and produce nature-oriented products and then offer them for sale collectively in the city, but that is rather an exception.

There are people who organise themselves well and sell their natural products here at the market. There are queues of people in front of these market stalls. We hear from friends in case products are delivered to Sofia with private vehicles, which is very nice for me. We have some problems here, like the rubbish in nature or the forest cutting.

There is an eco-festival, people from many cities go there. After the festival is over, there are big bags of rubbish in the forest, I don't understand that. I was a volunteer at a festival and it was the same. It takes a lot of time until even people with a more alternative attitude are consistent and come up with a good solution for such situations. I explained to a friend that when I go into the forest for "business", I make a pit and fill it up afterwards. But the plastic wipes, you have to take them with you, they have no place in the forest, that's plastic. I think there are few people who think like me.

I'm not an activist and I don't want to become one. I can imagine taking part in something, but I don't want to organise anything on my own, I can't do that. I have collected rubbish before, just like that. It's rather tragic when you go to the rubbish container with the bag and can't take it all away. Once I collected rubbish at a mountain pass, there are containers but nobody throws the rubbish in, which is very strange and annoys me. The mentality of the people is very strange, I can't understand it. Before there were plastic bottles it was a bit easier. It's a question of mentality and education. In the poorer countries there is a lot of rubbish, in Europe it is clean, that is my impression. Bulgaria is kind of in the middle. It bothers me a lot that there is so much rubbish next to the street. That really annoys me, here I could imagine collecting the rubbish.

Everywhere there is deforestation, it's really terrible. If you look at the Strandzha Mountains with Google Earth, you can see a lot of logging. One third of the Strandzha Mountains is in Turkey and two thirds in Bulgaria. Here, logging was not allowed, but now you see the effects of a neo-colonialism that has taken over all the former socialist states. You can export everything and as much as you want, it's a mass phenomenon. I see it in the Balkan Mountains or the Strandzha Mountains. Actually everywhere. It is a tragedy for nature. In the Rodopes, the sawmills work in three shifts, there are unbelievable quantities that are processed. People have employment, which is good, but everything has been exported for 30 years. You can't stop deforestation, the problem is very big. A friend of mine said that if he wins the lottery, he will make sure he finds a terrorist to murder all those who damage the forest so much. Only a brutal action can stop the dramatic situation with the illegal logging. It is simply unimaginable what kind of damage is being done, you can see it in my small town in the Balkans, the size of the felling is enormous, nothing grows there any more and of course wood is not growing fast as well. I could imagine planting trees, but this is not organised.

Quotes

People nowadays divide themselves into subcultures, they are also somewhat separated from each other. In today's villages there is a "simple culture" that does not respect nature.

There is the rubbish problem, which is very unpleasant. Even at eco-festivals that have a strong nature component, there are then big bags of rubbish that are left lying around, I helped out as a volunteer.

Only a brutal action can stop the dramatic situation with the illegal logging. It is simply unimaginable what kind of damage is being done, you can see it in my small town in the Balkans, the size of the felling is enormous, nothing grows any more so quickly.

I could imagine planting trees, but that is not organised. Deforestation is everywhere, it's really terrible.

Keywords

Reachability of nature for recreation; urban-rural difference of nature perception and use; Forest exploitation; volunteering challenge; family tradition of the use of nature; illegal camping practice and social practice

RL2_BU03, Bulgaria, The sustainable and informed use of nature

Narrative

My name is Ivan, I am 56 years old and I live in Sofia with my wife. Our children are 18 and 21 years old and they live with us in the same household. I am a cameraman and work freelance, my wife works as a pharmacist and deals with natural products and homeopathy. Our children study and have to live with us, our incomes are low, we have a small vegetable garden near Sofia and I have had beehives for a few years but they don't yield much. When I was little, my great-grandparents cultivated the garden, I remember the taste and quality of the fruit. People ask me if it pays off financially, then I have to explain that one tomato that tastes good to me is better than all of them together in one year. I have a good relationship with nature, my life is connected with nature. I don't think man is smarter than nature.

In summer we go to the seaside with friends, we bivouac in the forest and often we stay for three weeks. The best thing is that we can spend a lot of time in nature with our friends. During the day we go to the beach, in the evening we make a fire in the forest and

play with the other families and their children. We are then quite a big family. Any other holiday is too expensive for us. I like to be in nature by the sea, in as wild a place as possible, there is no infrastructure and no luxury there. I bivouac with friends in a hammock and can jump into the sea whenever I want. If there was no other way, I would also go camping, possibly with a caravan. It's different in a hotel, you're not in nature. We are lucky that you can go there and then stretch out your hammock in a forest. That gives me a lot of energy. I'm not sure, maybe there are 5 places like that in Bulgaria where you can still bivouac by the sea, that's left. Maybe a few more small beaches.

There are conflicts between people who have bought land, sometimes illegally, that was common a few years ago. There is a minimum distance to the sea that has to be respected. In order for the landowners to enforce their rights, there was a system of guards who didn't let anyone through. There was conflict and the state was under pressure.

How strong the state is a good question. In Spain, the beach was cleared of buildings, here it still exists. If there is no clear vision and rules, then there is conflict.

In earlier years there was a conflict at the seaside. The owner came and complained that you can't just pitch your tent here. There were also cases where tents were set on fire or firecrackers were thrown. I think it is normal to bivouac in nature. It is clear that it cannot be in an area where there are protected natural monuments. Where there are protected plants or animals, that's not possible, but otherwise it's the most natural thing in the world to pitch your tent somewhere. If I pitch my tent in a sensitive place in nature and I destroy a rare plant, then there is a conflict between my ego and nature. It's like politics, the ego exists there too. Only rules can create clarity here. When camping, there are already rules. When you go into nature, you have to accept that there are protected areas, you have to preserve them. There are dunes where we go, you have to protect them. In a forest, even when camping, you can't just clear trees, but you can collect old branches so you don't do any damage. It's also important for the toilet that you dig a hole and don't leave anything visible. Actually, you are not supposed to recognise that someone has been here afterwards. But here, too, there is a big information deficit. There must be laws that set clear rules. There was an accusation for a while that people who sleep in tents leave rubbish behind. My observation is that all those who come only for the weekend often leave rubbish behind, they are used to the civilised beaches where rubbish is always taken away from the beach, but here it is different. The people in the tents take everything with them. It is exactly the same with rubbish and waste. Politicians must pay more attention to the separate collection of waste, this is not something that an individual can decide. We have to rethink our society, which is about constant growth. You can't keep producing things that quickly break down. We really have to take care of nature, the earth is "running out of air". We have to think about how we can live in the future. If you don't think about it, then it can become critical. The way we live is not nature-friendly, there are more and more people worldwide who want to work less and spend more time in nature. Once I was at a festival, we won a prize, and they asked us if we felt sorry for nature. I said "no", I don't feel sorry for nature. As an Indian once said, as soon as the last tree is felled, man will live with great suffering.

It is man who will disappear, nature has a great regenerative power, but man will eventually cease to exist. I feel sorry for mankind, not for nature. If man cannot take care of his future, then that is a warning signal. I've heard we live in a Golden Age where historically it's easiest to get food to survive. But honestly, social cohesion is lacking,

resources have to be used rationally. We need a cohesion of states, like the idea of the EU is or in the US. Man can only take what he needs, but no more, I read that in a book. At the moment, the economy is designed in such a way that there has to be abundance so that those who have little access to resources also get what they need. There are certainly better models of how resources can be shared fairly. This is closely linked to nature. I don't see such a model in Bulgaria. It needs a government policy or at the global level to put things right that are out of hand. People who share this vision should come out more so that their vision can be heard. That's maybe one of the points where you have to think about whether a basic income is not a solution. I already want to make more, but maybe this is a solution. You don't have to produce so much anymore, you don't have to produce meaningless things.

I don't have time to go out into nature myself. To gather positive energy, you need free time. If you don't have time, you simply can't go out, even in the city. I have the most important source of income for the whole family, so there's not much room. But there are also people who have a lot of free time and then do stupid things or steal, that's the opposite effect. We had a whole house emptied, now only the walls are left. The other problem is envy. People don't want anyone to come with a tent so that everyone goes to hotels, but that's not possible. I would never go to a hotel, I don't have the money for it either. Besides, I have sun allergies and when the sun comes, I have to go into the forest. I can't do that in a hotel. Maybe you can do it in a campsite.

Humanity needs more awareness on how to use nature in a sustainable way. There are few people who live sustainably, many people just don't have access to good sources of information in the media. In Bulgaria there is no trustworthy information, often the independence of journalists and media is an important issue, often people just reproduce what a press centre tells the media. People actually have to listen to the experts, but often they don't ask a real expert for an opinion, but a person they know, so that the money stays in the circle of friends or family. The effect is that the information does not get through, this applies to nature, waste separation and many other areas. There is also illegal forest felling, which can contribute to dramatic flood events. A colleague of mine reported on forest felling as a journalist and was then very quickly dismissed. I once saw a police car with people running after it with wooden stakes, they chased the police away. In a forest like our summer camp by the sea, you are not allowed to simply clear trees, but you can collect old branches so that you don't do any damage. Also for the toilet, it's important to dig a hole and not leave anything visible. Actually, you are not supposed to recognise afterwards that someone has been here. But here, too, there is a big information deficit. It's not just the information, you have to educate people so that something changes.

Quotes

I like to be by the sea in nature. In a place as wild as possible. I can live for a long time with reduced luxury. It recharges me with energy when I bivouac in the hammock and can jump straight into the sea. You do need time to go into nature, anyone who has energy can manage that somehow. There are people who have time and earn enough to go into nature often. I am the most important source of income for the whole family, so there is not much room.

There must be laws that provide a clear regulation. For a while there was the accusation that people who sleep in tents leave rubbish behind. My observation is that those who come only for the weekend often leave rubbish, they are used to civilised beaches where rubbish is always taken away from the beach, but here it is different.

Keywords

Informal camping; sustainable use of nature; rules for use of nature; growth economy and humankind; privilege of time availability and wealth; Information needs and expert voice

RL2_BU04, Bulgaria, Only a few care about nature in our small village

Narrative

My name is Marina, I was born in 1958, and I live in a village in southern Bulgaria. I live here with my divorced husband; no one else would take care of him. My brother also lives with us. I can only see clear with strong visual aids, preferably contact lenses, but it is very expensive for me. We have our little shop on the street and there you can buy our peanuts or grapes, potatoes. Years ago it was a real shop with different food and other needs. Now we only sell what is harvested in the shop. Around our village there is only agriculture and a factory where plastic waste is recycled into new raw materials. Tobacco used to be grown here, now wine is important. There is also a farm with dairy cows, which is very modern and has a hundred animals. There is also a farmer who grows cherries for export.

Nature is also important for us, because we are dependent on nature here in the village; many people farm or have leased their land. There are two national parks nearby, but I visited them a long time ago, I have had problems with my eyes for a long time, why should I go where? I am glad that there is a bus every two hours to the next town. There is only a bus connection to our administratively responsible town twice a week. It must take me four hours to get to the capital Sofia, where there is also the eye doctor I go to. I am very happy that I have contact lenses, that is a relief for me, but I always need someone to accompany me to the doctor's appointment, the ticket for two people costs more, of course. The solar storms have changed our nature; I feel it in my organism. In 2004 I had a cancer treatment, I am glad to be alive. For me, it is especially important in nature that the air is clean. In our village there is a recycling factory and when plastic is processed there is a big stench. We started a petition together, then there were inspections to see if there were any violations of the rules to keep the environment clean. They said that everything was fine, but the smell didn't change. Actually, we were not asked whether we

wanted such a factory here. Only one person from the village works in the factory, all the other workers come from outside. There are many people in the village who farm, what else can you do here? My family has an eventful history, we were also expelled once under communism and were only allowed back to our village after three years, my family was also expropriated and received restitution after the fall of communism. Our family has always been successful in agriculture. We fertilise with manure and we also have a glass house. Our animals like sheep and goats are with us on the farm. Often there are big changes, so you need a bit of luck. This is our environment. Actually, farming and the time we spend working outside in the fields or in the garden near the house are our contact with nature.

We have often had the experience of really big changes. First we started to grow tobacco. Later we added viticulture. When they closed the tobacco factory that bought our production, we could just sell our last harvest, we had to travel almost 300km with the harvest of 700kg of tobacco in 1993. We traditionally use manure to fertilise our fields and also the glasshouse. The result is simply much better, but our soils are also much better than in the neighbouring village, there are so many stones. The tomatoes don't grow outdoors, it's too hot and too bright, nothing grows there, also because of the air quality. Recently, an entrepreneur planted many cherry trees, the field is really huge and nothing else grows there. The chemicals used in agriculture are not good for the environment. Especially in fruit growing or viticulture, there are a lot of chemicals. The cherries are exported; you can earn a lot of money there. An entrepreneur from Sofia started it. In the past, the small family farms simply took their animals to pasture in the harvested fields, that was important for agriculture. The meadows became fields, nowadays there is not so much pasture available.

Today, no one in our village does this anymore, and there is no pasture where you can go. There is hardly anything to find in the vineyards and you can't just destroy the vineyards with a herd of animals, goats and sheep eat almost everything. We have few animals, so it is enough for us. There is a new farm in the village, and they have over 100 cattle in the winter. In summer they are on the mountains, there is no fodder here. In the past, the animals, mostly sheep, used to walk a long way, but nowadays the cattle are organised by lorry, which works differently. You need a stable to put the animals in and the fodder is bought in, very little is produced here, it is also much too dry here. It is a different kind of itinerant farming; a lot has changed. A family has newly settled with us as neighbours, they make green manure, which is very rare here, in winter the fields are left fallow or the next crop is already sown. I offered them our manure, but the neighbour said they don't use it. Actually, I never come to nature, I have visited beautiful places many years ago, but there was always so much work.

People need to take care of nature like they do in Sofia, I have an idea how it could be more beautiful. It should be green here, but people are ruining nature. Our neighbour had a beautiful flower garden, then the cable TV came, dug up and broke everything, but they didn't restore it, such changes are frustrating.

There are people who always get into the car and don't even walk on their own two feet, how are they supposed to notice what's outside? There are holes in the road here where it just crashes when a car drives over it. People don't look at themselves, they don't look at their cars, how are they supposed to look at nature? Nature is less important than the economy, like with the factory in our town that pollutes the air we breathe. We had a petition about the factory, the youth didn't really fight back, they are rather less interested

in the issue. Women and men don't really differ in the way they deal with nature, but they deal with their bodies differently, I'm thinking of alcohol, there is a difference.

People are different, but often it doesn't make a difference whether someone is old or young, I don't think there is a difference in mentality, it depends on the person. Everything is individual, whether you like nature or not, that's a matter of attitude.

Quotes

Often there are holes in the road here where it just crashes when a car drives by. People don't look at themselves, at their car, how can they look at nature? It depends on the person, depending on how the person is, that's how he treats nature.

Nature is less important than the economy. The big livestock farmers have over 100 animals. He brings the animals to the mountains in summer, and here they spend the winter. The meadows have become fields, there is not so much pasture.

Keywords

Concept of nature; rural life; change of agriculture practice; nature and economy; respect to nature; non-causal concept of nature

RL2_BU05, Bulgaria, Fighting for rights in times of change as a retired agronomist

Narrative

My name is Michael and I am already 88 years old. I live here in the village, from my windows you can see the neighbouring village and also the north Macedonian border and the Greek border. My brothers were also partisans during the war, we were 7 children. My family has always been active in agriculture. I was the viticulture specialist for the local cooperative during the socialist period. My family was expelled in 1950, so we were resettled, then we were brought back three years later. We were hundreds of kilometres from here, the soil was even better than here. I was never a communist, that is very important to me. During that time there were many depressing experiences and circumstances. Actually, I worked in several cooperatives because there were always so-called reforms, none of which brought anything. They didn't want me to go to school after the war, but the headmaster personally intervened for me, then I was allowed to go to

school in Sandanski, but you had to walk there. I experienced many reforms in agriculture, the political elite always promised a lot, but they didn't keep any of their promises, but when it came to stealing public property, everyone was very clever.

I live here alone now, my children only come to bring me the groceries, they don't live here.

When you work in agriculture, you have to understand a lot about how nature works and how relevant issues for agriculture are interconnected. You have to know which grape varieties can be grown where and how to take grow them adequately.

60-70 years ago, there was small-scale farming here because the soil in our village is actually quite good. Soils are difficult to work on because they have a lot of clay, but they are not stony. At that time there were also pastures and meadows. With the meadows, if you mowed them, then you could raise good yields and also milk yields with the animals. Agriculture was also done by Greeks; the border is only a few kilometres from here. Nobody had the idea of entering the property of another farm and taking anything, that was absolutely forbidden.

When the communists came to power, the small-scale structure was totally changed and there was theft, disorder, ruthlessness. I experienced this first hand, they wanted to make me the culprit, but it turned out just fine. The way agriculture was practised after the land reforms by the communists completely changed the nature and life in the village. The villages in the Pirin Mountains were particularly badly affected, people moved away and the land was taken away from them. A lot of knowledge is connected with farming in a family business. You have to live and work with nature, you can't ignore nature, it determines what you can grow in agriculture. With the founding of the cooperatives, people started to grow only those crops where they could sell the fruits, i.e. tobacco, sesame, cotton, and they did that for the money. Then there was a famine here because there was not enough food. The economy and society were destroyed. I was responsible for the vineyards. Some varieties in our region are not at all suitable for here, others are grown for particularly high yields, but they can't afford the varieties at all. Then the quality ends up being poor and everyone is surprised. Of course, modernisation has taken place, but the landscape and the former division into small areas in agriculture have changed a lot. There were no chemicals in agriculture, that has changed a lot. But all that is no longer of any use, we have had a severe drought here for several years now and I am very pessimistic about whether our traditional varieties in viticulture can continue to be cultivated at all. It's now 30 degrees plus in November, I've never experienced that before. Everything has changed, the use of chemicals in agriculture, you spray everything you can find, even RoundUp as an herbicide. Agriculture that has everything - meadows, pastures, fields, forests and the necessary knowledge to farm well - doesn't exist here. What does exist are people who have come into money and then invest here, but that's not so easy, you can't invest in agriculture so easily. Of course, nowadays you can buy a lot of things as services, but traditional knowledge and an economy adapted to the conditions hardly exist here anymore. Politics cannot be separated from the question of nature. People's relationship to nature, to the earth and to work depends on politics. The state is deaf, it doesn't exist, even with the river that is on the edge of the village, the state doesn't care about anything. For many people here it's about a salary, a good income, nobody cares if a river is clean. I think we will only get rid of the communists in 100 years, all the factories belong to them, their children, the police, politics, everything belongs to them. I can't go to one of my fields, they put up a wall in front of it, I didn't want to sell my

land. This is a millionaire who has turned his people against me. I am fighting for my right; I have sent letters to all the institutions explaining the problem. Even the local land commission does not have a clear position, the prosecutor's office has written to me that I will go to jail if I remove the fence to access my land. I will also write to the president and the prime minister, I am seeking my right. I think the youth know how to deal with nature. But when there are laws and nobody looks if they are respected, then you do what you want. Here there is a drought and a change in the climate, but the people remain the same, the politicians don't make very big steps either.

How can I think about nature if there are no reliable institutions to protect my property?

Quotes

You cannot separate politics from the question about nature. People's relationship with nature, with the earth and with work depends on politics. Even the young know how to deal with nature. But if there are laws and no one checks whether they are observed, then you do what you want.

Keywords

Traditional agriculture and nature; technocrat agriculture; role of politics with nature; change of crop cultures; local temperature increase.

RL2_BU06, Bulgaria, Working with the sheep as a smallholder

Narrative

My name is Boreto and I live in a small village near the Greek border, I am 54 years old. I have two children and I am already a grandfather. My wife works often for periods abroad, so I am alone here. She goes there by bus, then she comes back by plane, there she works with fruit, now they are planted, then harvested in spring. My children often come to visit with their grandchildren. I used to work in as an employee in a small company related to my current small business. I started to build up a flock of sheep and now I already have the biggest flock in the village with more than 100 animals. But it is really a lot of work. You have to manage to produce enough fodder for the winter, but in recent years the summers have been very dry, so only the spring remains to harvest usable fodder. Our

village is quite poor, but everyone can make a living, but there are only a few children, they have to go to school by bus or sometimes friends take them in their cars. There is a small shop in the village, they drink a lot of coffee there. We are Roma, so we are not going there much. In the mountains people go to pick mushrooms and herbs, but here in the plains there is no such thing. There are also chestnuts nearby, there are people who collect them, but none of us do it.

Near the village I can go for a walk with the sheep. Every day in the afternoon I take my flock for a long walk in the meadows and fields around our village. The older people in the village already go out into nature, the young ones don't go outside. There is no one else here who has a large herd of animals, only in the next village there is another animal breeder. If you can afford it, you can have a pasture in the mountains, a fence is erected and then you can keep animals. My sheep are a special breed, there are sheep that can go outside, other sheep are more for the stable, there are differences. In the mountains there are other sheep, other sheep are bred there that also go on steep slopes. Here you cut the sheep's fur with scissors, by hand, it's a lot of work. When there is something in the pasture, they lie down under a tree and sleep, but now there is very little food, the animals walk much longer distances when they are in the pasture.

The animals clean the meadow, they fertilise the soil of course, there are no chemicals here. I have only one herd of animals, if there were two, it would be different here. There used to be 1,000 sheep here in the village and also goats, they ate away the bushes, the landscape was different then. I don't know if my children will take over my farming. If the state supports animal husbandry, it will continue, otherwise we'll just stop. Then there would be a lot of bushes here, that would happen quite quickly.

There is a river on the border of the village. In the past, the river was always maintained to prevent flooding. The trees are important for floods near the river, not the bushes. The river here is not free either, there are many trees and bushes, the water cannot flow off easily, you have to maintain the channels, otherwise there will be floods. The riverbed has to be clean, otherwise there will be floods. There never used to be floods in Bulgaria, last year there were some floods. There is either very little water or extremely much during a heavy rain, that is new here. Here in the neighbouring village, they recycle plastic. Now the water below the river is so polluted that it smells bad for the animals, they don't drink the water anymore. In summer, when it is hot, the factory smells very bad. There is supposedly a water purification plant, a sewage treatment plant, but it is only in operation when an inspection comes. But nature gives back what you give it or do to it, sooner or later.

In recent years there is often not enough rain. Even our irrigation canals that bring water from the Mountains carry less and less water because there is hardly any snow in winter, or if there is, then the snow comes much too late and melts away very quickly. It hasn't rained here for two months now, the earth is very dry. Nature has changed a lot, for a long time there were always 4 real seasons here, now it's different, there is only winter and summer. Even if there are anomalies of nature, man has to take care of nature. But man is not doing anything. The atmosphere has changed, I think after the war in Yugoslavia and now in Ukraine the air has become even worse. When there was the bombing in the Kosovo war, the vegetables became nothing. There are also artificial diseases, I think.

Here, people used to use and cultivate the soil much more, but now there is a lot of fallow land. Where there are vineyards on the hills around the village, farming pays off

because the soil is much better, but here along the pastures by the river, it is stony and not much grows. I need fodder for the animals and I grow alfalfa, which is also good for the soil here on the plain. But you have to water the alfalfa when it is very dry. There are ditches filled with water, the water comes from the mountains and you can divert water from the ditches to your own field. But that is a lot of work. The alfalfa can be harvested for 5-6 years, then you have to grow something else. Here it's too dry to make silage, I know it's available elsewhere, but you just can't do it here.

It's not just about money, it's about how people behave. I see how people treat nature, especially the waste is really a big problem. You throw everything away, but not in one place but where you like it. The rubbish is just left lying around or dumped somewhere. I see this every day when I'm out with the animals. People live off nature, but they don't take care of it.

There is a pollution of nature that didn't exist before. Years ago it was much stricter, you couldn't throw things away so easily. It depends on the mayor. Everyone knows what is allowed and what is not, but everyone just does it. Everyone throws their rubbish where they like. There used to be no plastic bags and nylon. It takes 40 years for it to disappear.

There used to be glass bottles, even yoghurt was in glass, now it's in plastic cups. There is a lot of plastic in the shops, it is just thrown away, it then remains as it is thrown away. In our country, the administration is the problem, most people in the administration are incompetent or they are on the take. Everyone thinks about money, but life is not only money. When money became so important, everything became different, everybody talks about money, the more you have, the more you want. You want more and more, but you can't because there are limits. The older people live longer, but the young have an unhealthy lifestyle. Many die young, which irritates me.

Technology has come so far that people can almost make rain when they want to, but nature, it only shows itself then, you can't just make nature do what you want, it fights back.

Quotes

There's a pollution of nature that didn't exist in the past. Years ago it was much stricter, you couldn't throw things away so easily. It depends on the mayor. Everyone knows what is allowed and what is not, but everyone just does it.

Even if there are anomalies of nature, man has to take care of nature. But man does not do anything.

The state should support man, support nature. But the people in the administration they don't care about anything, but they should supervise the observance of the law. If there is no law, then people do what they want.

Technology has come so far that people can almost make rain whenever they want. Nature then shows itself that you can't just do what you want, it fights back.

Keywords



Pasture and natural hazards; pollution awareness; farming practice; value of pasture for nature; waste disposal in nature; boundaries of using nature

RL2_BU07, Bulgaria, Living close to nature and experiencing changes

Narrative

My name is Boris, I am 43 years old and I live in small town in the south of Bulgaria. I am actually an electrical engineer. I used to work in Germany for many months every year as a cook, also during the COVID epidemic at the campsite. Now I have found a job here where I earn so much that I don't have to work abroad. For us, the sea in Greece is only 100 km away, no one else has that. I don't want to live in the city of Sofia, I can't stand all the stress and complicated life. I grew up in a small village near here, very few people lived there, it was also a very barren landscape and there were deep wells to get water. This year, the road to this village has been asphalted for the first time, because there is a church that people like to visit. But people hardly leave any money in our area, there is simply no suitable infrastructure here and those who visit our area then leave again straight away. Nature is a bit wilder here, there are many wild animals here, there are wolves, bears, wild cats here, that's different from Germany, for example. There are many hares and red deer there. Here you certainly meet fewer people in the forest, often you are all alone. I think it's better for nature if it's not constantly under human influence. I have been used to spending a lot of time in nature since I was a child and I am very attentive to changes in nature. I think I know a lot about nature. I also worked for years as a logger in the Pirin, so you experience a lot. Our nature here is very beautiful, we have a very beautiful environment, it is actually a paradise. I go to nature with friends, they are more likely to go with me because I put a little pressure on them, people don't necessarily like to go to nature, more if they have a reason to go out.

I think there is a difference between the generations, but you also learn very quickly. If you see that a person has a special relationship with nature, you can easily learn something from that person. But it doesn't always have to be the right way, you can also learn something wrong! Many young people have been abroad to work, they have seen how nature is treated in other countries, and then you can correct your own attitude. Here, anarchy reigns in Bulgaria. Everyone can do what he or she wants and there are no punishments. Actually, the weather is warm this year, but it is not good. It's November and it hasn't rained for months. It's far too warm, there must be rainfall in autumn too. Otherwise there has always been rain at this time of year. In summer it can be hot. In the last five years, winter came very late, before that it was always much too warm. Snow is much, much more important for us than rain. Snow brings water for a long time, until summer. Now there is always snowfall in March, but before that there is no snow at all for

months and no rain. For us, snow on the mountains is very important, otherwise there is no water in summer. Here we don't have wells for drinking water, even the irrigation canals lead the water from the mountains to the lowlands and to the vineyards. Our area is developing very slowly, not much has changed here in recent years. There is still a school with 30 children in the village, but there used to be 400 children in the school. I like being out in the forest or looking for mushrooms, I know a lot of mushrooms, but I only collect 4 different mushrooms. We dry the mushrooms more for ourselves, we don't collect extremely much. There are other people who know more about it and collect others, I don't dare to do that. In some villages here there are people who earn their living with it. But they have to go really far to collect enough, they sell it to a buyer.

Here there is a very famous tea, the Sideritis tea. It is forbidden to collect the tea. The tea is listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria, a register of protected plants. The plant is found at altitudes above 2000m. The name here is "Musalenski Tshai". This is the most famous tea here. The tea is picked at the end of July, and some people collect it in sacks to sell. I can't imagine that they earn enough with it. This plant grows wild here, but it has been cultivated for a decade. Anyone who wants to can cultivate the plant. If you want to, you can do that, but collecting it at the top is not so good.

There is enough for everyone, it is very beautiful up there, people go around and collect. There are big meadows up there, but you have to walk very far or have a jeep to get there. People know that it is forbidden to pick this tea. But they collect it anyway because the wild tea is much better than the cultivated tea. I don't think it's a real problem, but commercial collection can be stopped if you really want to.

For tea, older people tend to collect plants with medicinal value. They also know very well how they work. Here we also have oregano and mint, but tea can also be made from other plants. People who have few financial resources, who don't have enough, they have a special relationship with nature. I wouldn't say negative, but it's more about collecting something now, at the moment, from nature, not whether it can be like that in the future. Nobody cares if the same plant will grow again in a year. You take what you can take, you don't leave anything so that there will be something again next year. You look for another thing to earn money if there is no more crop next year. That's my observation about those who have to make a living, they have to look at the moment, they can't think about whether their children will find enough. There are simply other priorities and needs that are more important than preserving a resource. I used to work as a forestry worker, cutting wood in the Pirin Mountains. The forest administration marks trees that we are allowed to take. We cut the deciduous trees in the not so high parts of the mountains. Some people say that you just cut wildly into the forest and destroy nature. But where you cut out one tree, in a few years 2,3,4 other trees will grow. There's nothing wrong with that, it's enough to regulate it well so that the forest can recover. It should not be the case that there is erosion when there is a thunderstorm. If you remove trees one by one, that's no problem at all. There are many conifers that are felled for export, as building material, and one can earn good money with it. The wood is exported to Germany, where the forest is not felled in this way. I'm not sure, but maybe it's not fair if the entrepreneurs then make a big profit and get rich, but we as workers always get paid very little, our forests can certainly be used carefully, but sufficient rules must be introduced and monitored. The problem is actually different, it's the big animals, they cause a lot of destruction in our country, especially in the higher regions, including the Pirin National Park. I was in the Pirin National Park this year to collect huckleberries, I know where a lot

grow. Ten years ago there were also cranberries. Now, because of the big cattle, there is nothing at all, you can't find a single berry. There are no fruits left, no huckleberries, cranberries, raspberries, everything has been destroyed by the cows. Subsidies are given to the owners of the large animals, everyone who can does that. Especially many young people have started to keep cows. Subsidies are the only reason for this. Of course, there is a good side to state support, people should also honour this hard work. It is much more strenuous than cultivating a field. In animal husbandry, you always have to be available, you can't say you don't want to work one day. In the summer, when it's hot, you drive the large cattle, but also flocks of sheep up here, because it's so hot down here. Then there are thousands of animals on the mountain, from the village a hundred, from the next one too, and so on. Then there are thousands of animals up on the mountain. The animals always have to have food, so they are driven down the mountain in autumn. There are no fences, the animals are kept in the forest, on the meadows, just everywhere. This is a national park, a protected part of nature and nothing is left after the herds of animals. I don't know, the big animals destroy everything, if someone wants to go to the mountains in summer to collect forest fruits there is nothing left. There is mainly a lot of erosion because of the animals. There are no measures, no control and everyone can do what they want. There has to be control because of the many animals, only the state can do that and I mean the mayors have to regulate that. There is also a national park administration, which must also prevent so many animals from being brought there and causing damage. When I was a child, many sheep were traditionally kept in the villages here, they don't cause such damage, they didn't have to be brought to the mountains because they are used to a meagre diet and can survive the summer better. But there are very different bred sheep.

There is also the case that you buy the guards, you give them a note and they turn a blind eye when you are in the woods with the cattle. We are easy to buy, people don't have any money, but it's amazing that 25 euros is enough. Now there is no law enforcement agency that can stop people, here practically everyone can afford corruption. People know that it can't stay like this with the big cattle in the national park. The owners have enough money because they get subsidies, that is their motivation. The owners collect the subsidies, but they don't produce meat, they do it for the money. They keep the animals because of the money that the state distributes as subsidies, which are European funds. Of course there must be subsidies, but something sustainable must also be created for the money. This development is happening in many places in the mountains in Bulgaria. It is like that now, maybe the situation will change in the future, who knows.

People from the cities want to preserve nature because they don't have nature in the city. For us, it is on our doorstep. In the city, nature is something special, we are surrounded by nature every day, so we don't appreciate it so much. Very rarely do we go out, just like that, into nature. We tend to go nearby, to the next village. I have often observed that those who come from the city take their rubbish back with them and throw it into the rubbish bin. Here in the villages there is no such mentality, everyone just leaves everything. If there is packaging or plastic, they just leave everything. 99% of the people do it that way. The mentality is different Whatever we do in nature, somehow we ruin everything by our presence. Many don't consider that they are overloading nature. Nature is recovering, in my opinion.

Quotes

At some point, man will disappear and nature will be left without us.

It is rather forbidden to collect the Sideritis tea. In the Red Book of Bulgaria, a register of protected plants, the tea is in there. People know that it is forbidden to pick this tea, but they collect it anyway, because the wild grown tea is much better than the cultivated tea.

What you can take from nature you take, you don't leave anything so that there will be something again next year. You just look for something else if it's no longer available next year.

In the summer, when it's hot, you drive the cattle up, but also the flocks of sheep, because it's so hot down here. Then there are thousands of animals on the mountain, a hundred from the village, another hundred from the next village, and so on. Then there are thousands of animals up on the mountain.

People know that it can't stay like this with the large animals in the national park. Now there is no law enforcement agency that can stop them. The keepers have enough money because they get subsidies, that's their motivation. The animals are brought in because of the money that the state gives, which is European money.

Keywords

Cattle breeding in protected areas; negative effects of subsidies on nature; herb picking of protected plants; opposite effects of subsidies; urban and rural perception of nature

RL2_BU09, Bulgaria, My long experience of camping by the sea and in the mountains

Narrative

My name is Eva, I was born in 1975 and I live in Sofia. I actually have work occasionally, the income keeps changing. I live with my partner, a woman. We often go to a beach for a week with a tent, that's important to me. I have spent a lot of time in the mountains, this is where I like to be, and I am very careful with nature. I have often been out alone but also often with partners. I don't like crowded places, I prefer to be alone in nature, or with friends. It's nice to share the experience in nature. I also see again and again the

problems that have to do with the presence of people in these places. There is always pollution from discarded waste. My opinion is that it is a very individual thing how someone behaves in nature. There are people who like to go into nature but don't behave as they should. I really don't have much money, but actually everyone who lives in Sofia can get out into nature, the Vitosha Mountains are right next to the city, you just need a normal city transport ticket to go up there by bus. Otherwise, also because I can travel quite easily, I try to organise a cheap and quick journey with a car-sharing exchange, that's what I like best, and I have already made many acquaintances on such trips.

I like to go to the mountains, I take a tent, some equipment and then I usually stay in the mountains with friends for a few days or a week. You go to the mountains with a pullover, jacket, trousers and a rucksack, you need a lot to make everything work. You also need a gas cooker and food that is rather modest, so you don't have to carry so much, a tent and so on. I like to go to the Rila Mountains, where I know the manager of a hut. There I can also sleep in a tent, around the huts it's usually possible. I have seen here what happens when more and more people visit a place in the mountains. I'm not happy when lots of people go to the nice places. This is often connected with a special infrastructure like a lift up the mountain or a track that is easy to walk or drive on. I don't want to destroy anything, the ecosystems should not be disturbed or only minimally influenced. Where man climbs, it is immediately completely different. We collect the waste when someone leaves something lying around. It should not be visible that someone has been here. Traces are left behind, but they are as small as possible. We also make fires, but with great care. There are stones that border the fire and then you pour a lot of water on the fireplace so that it doesn't start to burn. I go out into nature and listen to the birds, the grasses rustling, I like that. I like to listen to the sounds of nature, that's my relaxation.

In the mountains, there has also been illegal hunting again and again in recent years. You can hear the shots. I think there are hunting companies, almost like a mafia, that do this, they hunt animals and I think the animals are then eaten, but I don't really know. There are park rangers who try to prevent what is forbidden, I can't say if there are enough park rangers, but you see them in some places. The wardens are employed by the national park, they take care of the forests, they also deal with illegal clearing. They are responsible for that and take care of nature. What is forbidden can be restricted a little, but you can't completely prevent something forbidden from being done. In summer I spend ten days at the seaside, often a little longer. I know at least three wild beaches, where I can be without clothes, sleep under the open sky, light a fire.

You do need a tent and a tent because of the sun, but you don't need much else. Something survival-like, there should be no cars, no people. I am then in the wilderness, there I feel myself and my connection to nature. We make holes in the forest for the toilet, then we pour sand on our emergency toilet, that's enough. On one of the beaches, which is several kilometres long, there is even a spring. We take a shower. Actually, you have to do everything yourself. You bring the food, you cook by the fire, you make music with your friends and you sit by the fire, it's a nice experience. There is also a cohesion between the people who are in the camps in the forest. If someone goes shopping, they can have someone bring them something. It's almost 5 km to the nearest beach, and you can't go there so quickly because the whole day is over. For a time at the sea, you are closer to civilisation, you don't need so much, a tent to put your things in, a sun protection tent because of the sun. I think whoever wants to can go to these beaches, it's accessible, anyone who wants to can do it. You need money for the journey, but there are also

carpools, you share the costs for the journey. It's faster than taking the train or bus. The money for food is the same at home. You don't pay for accommodation, so everyone can kind of afford it. You also see a lot of really big families on holiday there. Sometimes there is a problem with hygiene. Those who are not experienced with camping leave their toilet paper somewhere. If everyone uses an extra place in the forest as a toilet, then the paper flies around because of the wind, of course that's not good and it's certainly not healthy for the people who are there. I have wondered if that is why there is diarrhoea for a few days on site. I've already seen what happens when people don't pay attention, toilet paper flies everywhere, it's brutal. We always collect the rubbish, even the rubbish that others have thrown away, whether it's bottles or toilet paper. Everyone has to be careful, otherwise it doesn't work. It's a good question whether you can just dig a hole in nature because of the need to urinate. Once here, then there, then there. It's questionable whether you should do it so easily. You're interfering with a natural system, but surely a hole for urination is better than leaving your shit somewhere. You don't just use toilet paper, you also use plastic, which is really terrible because it can hardly disintegrate and stays there forever. Actually, one solution would be to build a toilet, you can go there, then still sleep in the tent. At least it's an option. One of the beaches we visit has changed a lot in the last few years. Now there is a part where there are little shacks, little houses where you can stay overnight. In the other part there is still the forest where you can camp. I don't see any conflict between the two groups that are there. In fact, I have never heard that there is conflict between the surrounding villages and those who camp in the forest. In the north I camped once on the rocky coast, people were very friendly, they gave us fruit and vegetables and we talked to the people, that was very nice.

On another beach in the south, there was a fence built on the beach. Nobody knows why they protect a meadow there. Then one person explained to me that there is a special kind of poppy (papaver). You can't understand it on your own. The plant is protected and endangered, nobody can know that. In the mountains there are well-known natural monuments, it is clear that they are protected and there are barriers where necessary, you can see that. It would be good if there was more information about where certain animals or plants are worth protecting. You don't know why something is forbidden or protected. You have to preserve nature, at the seaside I have already signed lists of signatures against the construction of buildings in the forest and on the beach, there are groups of young people who clean up a beach when the season is over, I think that's very important. There is serious cleaning, by the sea, in the mountains, I think the groups are called "Seleni Patruli". Plantations with trees are also done so that nature and the system are preserved. I have already participated in such activities. Friends have told me when something has taken place. It is not only work, it is also a social thing to be part of such an activity.

I learned most about nature from my mother and father. Today, children learn quite a lot already at school.

What impresses me is that people today are much more open to nature. People also think much more about the systems in nature, and I also think that people deal with nature in a more harmonious way nowadays. But I think it depends very much on the person whether one treats nature well. It's possible for someone to charge up his energy in nature and say to himself that that's all he's interested in, without thinking about nature at all, but I'm not like that. I want to have fun and after me I don't care about anything, there should be. But I haven't experienced that yet.

I have an inner conflict. I like it in nature, but I'm not sure if my presence for 7 days doesn't break something. It is often quite unclear what one is allowed to do or not, the information is not accessible. At the same time, you have to be careful not to simply block the last natural beaches, that would be a disaster.

If you are not experienced at all, it would be very good to have the information about what you can and are allowed to do. In my opinion, people today think more about the next generations, they talk a lot about resources. A lot of resources are exhausted, so if you are 18-20 years old, you are certainly well informed. Also whether you eat meat, for example, because of animal death, or because of the strain on ecosystems, this generation has many activists. This generation reads a lot, they want harmony with nature, not just exploitation by humans. The ideas are diverse, more oriented towards nature, also how to build. I learned a lot from my parents, it's a tradition in my family to go out into nature. I get a lot of information from friends and directly on the internet, a lot from Facebook, my friends post a lot about nature, I also get information there on email. I was once in Sofia at a seminar on waste and learned a lot at such a seminar.

Quotes

I'm not happy when lots of people go to the nice places. I like to go with very little luggage. I don't want to break anything, the ecosystems should not be disturbed or only minimally affected. Wherever people go, it's completely different.

I think anyone who wants to can go there, it's accessible, anyone who wants to can do it. You just need money for the journey, but there are also carpools, you share the costs for the journey. It's quicker than taking the train or bus. The money for food is the same at home. You don't pay for accommodation.

We always collect the rubbish, even the rubbish that others have thrown away, whether it's bottles or toilet paper. I've already seen that if everyone doesn't pay attention, toilet paper flies everywhere, it's brutal. Everybody has to pay attention there, otherwise it doesn't work.

There are no signs by the sea. Once I was at a beach in the south, there was a fence, and nobody knows why they protect a meadow there. Then a person explained to me that there is a special kind of poppy (papaver) there, but otherwise you can't understand it at all. The plant is protected and endangered, nobody can know that.

Keywords

Tourism and nature; rules in nature; protection of nature; activism and voluntary activities; human hygiene in nature; increase of visitors in nature; wild camping; inner conflict of use and protecting nature; accessibility of nature

RL2_BU10, Bulgaria, Living in a small town and enjoying our manifold nature on the Danube river

Narrative

My name is Miroslav, I am 52 years old, and I live in a small town in Bulgaria, I grew up here. Here I work as a teacher. I worked in Sofia for a few years, but I didn't feel at home at all. My wife has a qualified work as author and can work from home. We bought a house here some decades ago, then we moved here with the family. Overall, our income is not very high, we get by, but this year we couldn't go on holiday, we were here at home. Our two daughters study in a big town and often come to visit us for longer periods. Our house is right on the bank of a large river. We can see trees out of the window and if we go a little way into the garden, we can see the stream. There are always floods here, so the landscape changes a bit and very rarely the water reaches our garden. When I look out the window and don't see nature, I don't feel alive. I love to see the sky. Our house is by the river, whenever I go to work I walk along the river, then I walk back like that. The first years we lived here, we always walked like this, no one knew that anyone lived in our house, we were never seen on the street. I walk through the park in the morning and after school. I'm much more balanced when I come home.

I walk through nature every day, it gives me a lot of strength for life. My religious teacher says that you can find a balanced self with meditation, but to get a quick effect you have to go into nature. For me, man is part of nature. Man is not at the centre of the world, according to the church, God is at the centre. When man takes care of nature, that is also taking care of himself. There is always harmony in nature, also that man is in harmony with nature, that is important. There are beautiful, wild places that need to be preserved, where people can connect with nature.

The sea is hundreds of kilometres away from us, so we need a lot of money to get there, even if you stay in a tent, the journey alone costs a lot of money. This year we couldn't afford it. I know very beautiful and wild places by the sea. Where we go to the sea, it's not always cleverly organised. You could offer local products on the camping beach, then people wouldn't drive so often to the surrounding towns. Everyone would be happier, someone could also make a small profit. The winners don't have to be hotel owners, big companies or the state. The priority should be to have a healthier population that is well rested. Recovered people are important for society. What you see on TV, it's always about money, not about people's well-being. It is a question of state policy and clear decisions and mindfulness at a higher level than now.

In the south of the Black Sea, there are places I have often visited, now they are built up with hotels. In summer, there is no recreation for me when I go to a hotel. In the hotels you get more of what you have in a city, it's even worse, there are more people in

one place than in the city. I have to go to the wild nature, if I am not close to nature I can't relax.

In recent years, our community has built a wall to protect against flooding. During the construction, a building company destroyed a wetland by the river. It was actually that suddenly the excavators came, we were not informed at all, it was terrible. The people in the city thought that the river would be cleaner because of that. But they didn't come here at all, they didn't know how valuable and beautiful it is when nature creates its own order. Many people do not have a positive attitude towards the power of nature and do not see the value of wild nature.

Unfortunately, I can't often visit places in nature that I have to travel to. Here in our small town, there are beautiful places in nature just like everywhere else, it's like that in every town. On Saturdays and Sundays, we go for long walks, they are outings with friends and we appreciate it very much. There are really a lot of beautiful places around our town. But people don't go out and see the beautiful places. Wherever you go it is beautiful and calming, even if it is not something special or a protected part of nature. Now I have noticed that in one of the most beautiful places, rubbish is being dumped, the landscape is becoming a rubbish dump there too. Also along the river there are really many herbs, thyme, mint in large quantities. The islands in the Danube remind me of China, it is really very beautiful. It turns out that there are really beautiful places around our city, I never imagined that. But why nobody goes out, I don't understand. In our school there was an Eco-club. When we go out into nature, we always pick up the rubbish, but when there is a lot of rubbish, you don't do that anymore. Good education of children on the subject is very important. At school, we often cleaned the Danube beach with the Eco-club. Unfortunately, a small group that keeps throwing away rubbish is enough to make the beach dirty. Children can still be educated at school if their parents cannot.

Adults need punishments, strict laws, it must also become easier to signal when pollution happens. Schools are very important, for example when it comes to separating waste at school itself, you can also organise competitions on waste separation, the prize could be an excursion for the school class. That would change the situation at school, the children will then do the same in the future and also pass on the knowledge at home. Anyone who does not go into nature or is not allowed to go into nature will not understand how valuable nature is. In the end, it makes no sense to protect nature.

You have to start showing children in childhood how valuable nature is. You don't need resources for that, for example, there can be a bird house at a school where the children can see birds. Or you can go on a hike twice a year, you don't need a lot of resources. The school trips were our best moments in the school day. Children, young pupils need to go out into nature, from an early age. If they don't get used to it, they won't recognise nature as important and valuable. It is a problem that education about nature is not good. If a person does not grow up in nature or does not develop a strong connection with it, then other interests develop. Recently in school we organised a club and also distributed information material. In our part of the town there are people who dump their rubbish on the riverbank or throw rubbish directly into the river. We made films, which were then shown in the media. You have to explain to people that rubbish takes a long time to decompose. There is often too little education on the subject or the desire to deal with such problems.

A state should take care of its people, but also of its nature, there should be enough parks for children to play. There should also be more excursions and children's camps, that makes people more connected to nature and that also makes the state stronger.

Regulated and controlled access to nature is a good solution. But it must be clear what you are allowed to do and what you are not allowed to do, there must also be penalties. It depends on the case. You can't block all places, if necessary you can block access to a place. For example, if a small territory is subjected to strong regulations, but other parts are accessible, then I don't see any problem there. We are not the only living beings, there has to be space for other living beings as well, humans cannot take everything for themselves. The question of whether it should be certain people who regulate access is difficult. On the one hand, people who understand how important a place is must decide, on the other hand, these experts can then have a one-sided opinion. The decision whether or not to allow access to a space can be made at round tables, but different opinions should be represented there. Round tables should include representatives who know about education, conservationists, the administration, all that is important, a balance is important. Not that ordinary people decide everything, they can't always know everything in detail, but also not only specialists, they sometimes only look at their interests and they don't look at other opinions or a broad picture. Therefore, decisions should be made from a diverse perspective of many interests, not one-sided. It is about all possible interests and uses, not just one, not just people, not just money, not just nature or a living being.

Nature should be accessible for people, it should not be too expensive to get there. If there is a small price to pay to stay in a special place in nature, then that is acceptable. To get to nature, to go to places further away, you need money, but to go to places close by, you don't need many resources. There is also the city bus, the bicycle or you can walk. It depends less on finances than on a person's desire to go to nature. If you live in poverty and have a lot of work, you can't easily go to nature, it's different because you don't have the time. One cannot immediately determine whether a place in nature should be entered by man. It depends very specifically on the place and its characteristics. It depends on whether there are certain animals that need to be protected. If so, it is better to protect these places, then only specialists or biologists should enter such a place, or people who need to be made aware of the importance and beauty of nature, such as schoolchildren.

Quotes

If you have not seen nature or experienced it like this, you cannot appreciate and protect nature. In summer there is no recreation for me when I go to a hotel, for example. In hotels you get more of what you have in a city, it's even worse, there are more people in one place than in the city. I have to go to the wild nature, if I am not close to nature I can't relax. The decision whether to enter a place or not, that can be clarified at round tables, but there should be different opinions represented.

Keywords



Education on nature; expert role in protection; healing from nature; small towns and nature; behaviour and education on nature; rules and law; payment for access to nature

RL2_HU01, Hungary, Dealing with energy poverty while respecting nature

Narrative

My name is Gabriella, a retired librarian (70) who made the decision to move to a small village two years ago from the capital where I have been raising my daughter together with my mother after the untimely death of my husband. After the passing of my mother, I remained alone and moved to the village where my daughter has already been living with her family. I wanted to be closer to them and we could support each other in our daily lives.

However, life in a rural environment is a new and strange phenomenon to me since I have been living in a big town my whole life; e.g. I have little experience with nature or the rural self-sufficiency issues such as raising my own plants or providing for my own fuel. Anyway, I feel a bit closer now to nature, I need to adapt to my new life: I plan to cultivate my 'little' land behind my new house and I took up taking daily walks in the nearby forests in a quiet way.

My new house has both a gas boiler and a mixed-combustion stove but due to the soaring gas prices I decided to use the stove and during my forest walks I routinely collected some fallen branches and other wood in the forest. At one such occasion a man in civilian clothes – who turned out to be a civil guard – warned me that such behaviour is illegal since some parts of the forest is private property and others belong to landscape protection areas.

After discussing it with my daughter, I decided to visit the local council where – due to my low pension – I received a license to collect wood in a specified area for a specified amount, and the right to purchase such wood for a discounted price. It is however not clear when or at all I would get such 'social' firewood because of the long waiting list and the possibility that 'acquaintances' get the firewood in the first place, as well as because of the related organisational and transport issues it is still the most certain way for me to collect the firewood myself.

I also do not want to be a burden on my daughter with such issues. I try to stick to the rules and only collect where I am allowed to do because it would be unpleasant to be called on again. First, I did not tell my daughter that I am collecting firewood because they are young and optimistic but I am always afraid that the worst-case scenario will happen and therefore I like planning for the unexpected situations, e.g. what if we cannot afford gas or firewood? The worst is when hardship comes unexpectedly and you cannot see the way out – I do not like uncertainty and I am too old to adapt to unexpected situations.

From my childhood I have experience of waiting for coal but that seemed to be more planned than the current situation in the village with 'social' firewood. Anyway, I see that nowadays logging has accelerated and also many people seem to collect trash with which they might also heat their houses. I understand that it is an emergency situation now but I am wondering how this would affect the environment? I have one bad experience from my childhood when the hills with cut trees have been demolished after a big storm – cutting too many trees for the purpose of firewood is surely detrimental. In terms of nature protection, I see here good examples, such as the public workers maintaining the village nice and clean and there are of course also bad examples, for instance I saw newly-built houses where they buried the trenches and thus affected the flow of rainwater. Anyway, even under the current hard circumstances it seems so to me that here in a village people are more responsible towards their surroundings. In fact, the civil guard was also only trying to protect the forest. It is important that people living here have a direct responsibility for nature and it is part of their life to protect plants. Of course, there is also the fact that here 'everybody knows everybody' so if somebody is engaged in some truly polluting activities, e.g. firing with trash then it is difficult to conceal this from the neighbours.

Quotes

It is important that people living here have a direct responsibility for nature and it is part of their life to protect plants (the environment).

It is better that I got closer to the environment – it is a new experience for me.

The advantage [of collecting firewood by myself] is that I can do it on my own schedule.

The worst is when hardship comes unexpectedly and you do not see the way out: nobody knows what the situation is going to be (with regard to the gas crisis).

Keywords

New start, responsibility towards nature, energy poverty, uncertainty, self-reliance

RL2_HU02, Hungary, Smallholder trying to make ends meet through sustainable farming

Narrative



I'm Lajos, a 55-year-old smallholder in a north-eastern Hungarian village lying in the floodplain of the river Tisza. I have been living my whole in this village and I have been engaged in farming for more than 30 years. I have already acquired more than 400 hectares of land where every cm² is used: I grow arable crops and plant forest trees wherever possible, and have pasture for animals where not. My parents had also two cows and were small farmers – you might say that animal husbandry is in my genes. My current flock of animals, i.e. around 30 Hungarian grey cattle cows are the descendants of a stock that I received on loan from WWF back in 2009. They wanted to re-introduce native animals and achieve sustainable landscape management and rehabilitation in this area which is quite unique since it is in the floodplain of the Tisza. As far as I know this area was in the best shape before the nationalization process in the 60s when all smallholders had an interest to keep their parcels tidy, mowed down the terrain and grazed livestock. Since then, agriculture has decreased, livestock has developed backwards and invasive species such as the false indigo bushes spread all around the terrain. Not many people engage in animal husbandry here nowadays. You need to be committed because it is difficult and comes with great responsibility: even if I do not eat, the animals have to eat every day. In fact, I am the only one in the village having Hungarian grey cattle since this is not a popular cow type. It has a small body with few meats, while the traders want to buy cattle that has minimum 6 thighs as big as of an elephant.

You can have a profit with farming only with land-based aid coming from the EU. I have to be honest that I do not support the current logic of land subsidy when you also get it if you simply mow the pasture: I would only give it to such farmers who also keep animals on their land. Cutting down the pasture for subsidies is simply a waste of gasoline. But I also see the beauty in animal husbandry: beautiful animals are raised and meat is put on the table. This is the main reason I am doing it but also because I want to contribute to the sustainable landscape management with environment-friendly methods. Therefore, I am not only having cows and grow crops but also cut down the invasive indigo bushes and planted energy willows on their place. This was in line with a programme of the local municipality where they successfully managed to solve the heating issue of their public buildings such as the kindergarten, school, doctor's office and council building. The municipality has its own parcels where energy willow was planted in place of indigo which is now regularly cut down by their public workers and transformed into biomass with which you can heat.

I had a plan of cutting down and selling my energy willows to a nearby energy plant but they went bankrupt and closed down 8 years ago so I cannot use my energy grass right now and constantly looking for a way how to sell it because I have neither machines nor people. But having an unused energy willow plantation is still better than having a 'jungle' of indigo bushes on your land. I am living in the village and I am out on these fields every day so it disturbs me that many land-owners do not cut the harmful jungles on their lands. The view is ugly but I cannot do anything about this since it is not my territory and officially they do not break any laws. The solution for a more sustainable, eco-friendly floodplain management could be that farmers like me buy the smaller parcels of other people who cannot maintain them. These are usually older people who do not want to sell their own lands because they still remember how it was taken away from them or their parents in the old system. When these old people eventually die, their children will sell the land to make money and then such 'jungles' of bushes can be torn down. There are also

people who are holding to their land speculatively since its price will surely increase in the future. I have also been involved in a study trip in the Netherlands where we checked how polders (similar areas as the one here in the Tisza river-basin) are maintained. I think that they have totally different options for sustainable floodplain management there since they could fence off a large territory for landscape management and animal husbandry. This land is as big as one Hungarian county and I guess it is in state property while we are dealing here with small parcels in individual hands.

Quotes

You might say that animal husbandry is in my genes. Animal husbandry comes with great responsibility: even if I do not eat, the animals have to eat every day.

I don't agree with the logic that you get a land subsidy even if you simply mow the pasture: if you work on something, it should be productive (...) I would only give a land subsidy to someone who also keeps animals on it.

I cannot use my energy grass right now and constantly looking for a way how to sell it because I have neither machines nor people.

Keywords

Smallholder, floodplain management, landscape rehabilitation, grey cattle, energy willow

RL2_HU03, Hungary, Loving nature, living from the nature

Narrative

My name is Márta, a 52-year-old woman with six boys living in a 500-people village in Southern Hungary. I was born in this village and I have been living here my whole life; I was only away while studying. I am a gardener by training but I could only work in my chosen profession until my first pregnancy after which my employer, the state-owned farm got disbanded and I could not return. Afterwards I was at home for long periods with my boys and I lived from casual jobs, such as industrial factory work where I did 12-hour shifts while providing for my family.

In 2019 my life took a sudden and positive change when I got employed by a newly established social cooperative where we collect wild mushrooms and other plants and herbs from the surrounding forests lying by a nature conservation area, and process these ingredients in various ways (e.g. into cream, syrup, pesto) then sell the fresh products at markets or online, now even to fine dining restaurants in Budapest. This is a small-scale plant where we do everything manually in the collection and processing (e.g. cleaning, labelling and filling the bottles) with 2-3 other colleagues and some local daily helpers. This work is particularly benefitting for me because I have been living together with the nature since my childhood. You have to know and like the forests for this job. As I say you leave your troubles behind in the forest – it is a sort of therapy. If I do not walk ten kilometres each day then I am getting sick. Going out into the forest – this is what I like the most in this job and I also enjoy the flexibility in terms of working hours and responsibility. Otherwise, it is beneficial in financial terms since I get a full-time salary. Even when I was working in factories I always tried to come out to the forests: I was collecting mushrooms, herbs or snails alone or with my children for own consumption or for selling them to state-owned plants or private purchasers. This is quite common in this area: when there are a lot of mushrooms, anyone who can lift their legs will go to the forest and take something home.

As a rule, 2 kilograms of mushrooms can be collected by everyone without license but now the cooperative got us a license so we can collect in a specified area as much as we want. When collecting the mushrooms and herbs we are respecting the nature and the forest: we are only collecting and processing seasonal plants and mushrooms, we do not exploit the soil so our supply may vary seasonally or even weekly. I think that this kind of mentality is lost: nowadays it is very rare, especially under 30, that someone knows which one is a 'good' herb and which one is a 'bad' plant while the previous generations have known all about them. It was needed since there was no plastic, shampoo or detergent and they had to solve all kinds of problems with herbs, e.g. washing, diseases.

There is no such love or respect towards nature nowadays: this is visible from the trash left behind by people such as workers in the forest. I do not say that people got worse but there is much more plastic and such trash that can be thrown away. Trash disturbs me and I always try to collect them in one place at the edge of the forest where the forest rangers can pick them up later. We tried to transfer some of our knowledge and experience by showcasing our work to local children. The smaller children were enjoying the presentation but the 7th and 8th graders were already generally uninterested. If children are given a choice, they will certainly not choose the forest, neither as a livelihood nor as a hobby. If they want to see a forest, they will search for it in a computer and check it online. However, there is interest in our work and products from other people, such as chefs. Chefs from Budapest visited us once and I joked that we have just had the largest number of chefs per square metre in Hungary. On the one hand, it makes me proud that our ingredients and products are used in expensive restaurants and on the other hand I find it amusing that they are using 'weeds' such as purslane for their dishes. In my opinion these are war foodstuff: this is what people ate when there was nothing else left since they took the men to the front and the women had to pick these plants. I also tried to extend my knowledge and become an official mushroom inspector but once there were not enough applicants for a local training and once the training was too far away. Now I can only unofficially help people who might come to our plant to ask whether a mushroom is edible or not. Lately they have also found oil and gas in the area and a Texas-based

company got concession for its extraction. You can see 35 small flares burning the methane in the night around our forests. The Americans also came to our village and presented how the people would benefit from the oil production. Most of the people were enthusiastic but I was sceptical: what kind of jobs can you offer to local villagers even if you found oil here? They would need experts that we do not have. Honestly, I was afraid that the oil production would destroy the environment and end our forest activities. So I was relieved when they only found hot water in this village. We do not need to destroy the forest even more; the changing – drier and warmer – weather is already hurting the mushrooms anyway.

Quotes

When there are a lot of mushrooms, anyone who can lift their legs will go to the forest and take something home.

Nowadays it is very rare, especially under 30, that someone knows which one is a 'good' herb and which one is a 'bad' plant" "If children are given a choice, they will certainly not choose the forest, neither as a livelihood nor as a hobby.

Keywords

Mushrooms, herbs, local manufacturing, forest conservation, traditional knowledge

RL2_HU04, Hungary, Nature-loving pensioner supplementing her income from nature

Narrative

I'm Tünde, a 62-year-old retired woman with three children and grand-children living with my retired husband in a small village in Southern Hungary. Before retirement I have been working as a cleaning lady for 32 years in the local primary school. My original profession is shoe-upper part maker but I never worked as such.

Originally, I am not from this village. When I was five, my mother pregnant with twins moved here from an Eastern Hungarian village with me and my siblings. She found a new husband and we all stayed here. First, we were outsiders in the village and they looked

upon us with hatred because they felt sorry for my step-grandmother who had to give shelter for five children.

My parents were alcoholics and we were poor. My father was a really nice person, he never ever beat us, but my mother was difficult. I remember going to summer kindergartens even at the 7th grade just to get some food. We lived next to the nearby forest so from my childhood I had a good relationship with nature.

However not all my memories are good: our mother sent us at the age of 10-12 to get her wine from a neighbouring farmhouse. We had to go through the forest with my brother to get there and she also asked us to collect some firewood for heating. Imagine making your young children to walk in a dark forest for hours to get wine and steal wood! But I think that our upbringing has made me and my five siblings what we are today. We vowed not to live the life of our parents. We all live in this village and are in a good relationship with each other. We all studied and obtained some qualification. We all worked hard and have a good work ethics. I went into retirement three years ago but I have not fully stopped working. We have some backyard farming with rabbits, chickens, hen and vegetables such as potato or garlic. I like doing all household chores by myself; I even bake my own bread. And I also help out every now and then in the local social cooperative where I collect mushrooms and other herbs for a daily rate. My husband is angry with me that I do not fully enjoy retirement but this work in the nature with friends is good for me. I have had health problems with my intestines but since I am regularly helping out here, I feel much better! I like going out in the nature although I prefer walking in the pasture (not in the forest). When I am collecting mushrooms and herbs alone, I prefer staying at the edge of the forest, or I will stay with my companions. I also do not know mushrooms that well – now I am learning – so I rather pick plants such as acacia, pine bud, bearberry, elderberry, linden, etc. I am usually picking berries with villagers as old as me. Younger people do not like to work, in particular do such ‘unrewarding’ jobs in the nature. There is not that much poverty in the village that they have to go out and make a living in such a way. It is really only half-wits like me who go out to the nature and collect plants all the time. There is no real poverty here (yet), anyway what does this term mean? By European standards we are poor, but by local standards, where you have somewhere to live, something to eat, something to wear, something to work, somewhere to educate your children, as long as you have this...there is no real poverty. As I say until you have something to throw out there is no poverty. Anyway, the village is getting older. If this generation dies out, it will be over. I admit that I have not brought my own children with me to the nature when they were young thus they do not like it either. And you cannot enforce them. However, when my grandchildren visit me I ask them to put down their phones and come out with me to help in the nature or around the household. I try to teach them new things, e.g. to make soup dough, knead scones, braid garlic, peel poppies, crack nuts – I taught the little one to sew with a sewing machine.

Quotes

But I think that our upbringing has made me and my five siblings what we are today.

It is really only half-wits like me who go out to the nature and collect plants all the time.



As I say until you have something to throw out there is no poverty.

Younger people do not like to work, in particular do such 'unrewarding' jobs in the nature.

Keywords

Work ethics, poverty, rough childhood, self-reliance, mushrooms, herbs, forest conversation, practical training

RL2_HU05, Hungary, Fighting for and spreading environmental values

Narrative

My name is Barbara, a 60-year-old disability pensioner of Roma origin who lives alone in a small Eastern Hungarian town. I moved here from Budapest 20 years ago. I live in a house near the Roma settlement of the town where big manufacturing companies are located. The municipality rented out this area for industrial companies due to logistical reasons – the chemical ingredients can be easily transported by train to the factories – but also because of the Roma-characteristics of the area. For 18 years I have been struggling against one multinational pharmaceutical factory next to my house which violates basic environmental regulations, e.g. their noisy and smelly trucks park outside on the street, the truck drivers constantly litter and do not respect the neighbouring community, industrial dust and chemicals are released into the environment.

I have turned to many official places here and tried to activate other local people but now I am left alone in my fight. Most Roma and other people living here do not want to take action against the local companies since they provide employment; similarly, it is not in the interest of the municipality to regulate the factories in any way because they are the biggest local taxpayers. The company also gained more support during the Covid-19 pandemic when they provided public institutions such as hospitals and children's home with free disinfectants. I am an active member of some Hungarian environmental activist groups and are in contact with international movements such as the Red Rebellion. However, nobody dared support me when I started a litigation against the company two years ago. They were afraid that they might lose their jobs or were threatened in other ways. I have also been myself threatened by truck drivers at my home. I must admit that I am afraid too but I cannot give up because that would be a bad example for other people. I feel that this company has caused me so much damage, and I have so much anger and despair towards them that there is no way I will give up. I am not only talking about material damage and environmental pollution but I also have family and health issues: my

children went back to Budapest due to these unfortunate circumstances and I have been diagnosed with lung cancer and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and put into disability pension. I started this litigation to make the firm stop its negligent behaviour and treat their environment with respect. The respect of nature I brought from my upbringing and I passed on to my children. I was raised by my grandparents in Southern Hungary; my grandfather was a Roma woodcutter who taught me to treat forests and nature with care. I was taught never to cut a tree which still has a leaf on it. When my grandmother picked mushrooms in the forest, she crushed and scattered the old ones on the ground so as we would have new mushrooms next year. Even when I moved to Budapest in my youth I brought this approach with me. For instance, we were the ones who voluntarily planted the trees in the parts of the 11th district where the new metro line is now running. It embitters me to see that you cannot find shade in the Roma settlement here; there are no trees. Today's 40s do not teach their children to respect nature and that is really bad. I was invited to a local segregated primary school to make presentation on environmental issues to children. They were truly receptive to simple environmental tips, such as not running the tap while brushing your teeth. If they are not educated, they will not know such tricks. They are not bad children because they are Roma, but because of what they are later brought up to be. They are not born that way, they are not created by God to be bad from the start, but they become so because how they are later treated by others. My aim is now with the activist groups to have environmental protection to be included as a separate subject in education. I think it should be as important as the 4 main subjects. I always thought that we as individuals cannot stop climate change but our task is to make others aware of it. The Earth will not perish because I drink from a PET bottle: climate change should be definitely solved by governments however the environmental protection is the duty of the individuals. For instance, I am not in favour of volunteers later picking the trash thrown away next to the railways – people should know that they are not allowed to litter in the first place. Even though I think that the litigation will not solve my problems we have had successes with the activist group. The illegal dumping places were cleaned up in the Roma settlement, the municipality installed trash bins and surveillance cameras, and also let the public fountains open in the summer. I think that it is evident that the firm litigated will not pay any compensation for damages but they have made small correction steps. The trucks are not parking any longer outside on the street, they have built a noise barrier wall and planted trees around the factory building, and lately there have not been any chemical spills. Anyway, I assume that everything will return to its old routine after the trial is over.

Quotes

They are not bad children because they are Roma, but because of what they are later brought up to be. They are not born that way, they are not created by God to be bad from the start, but they become so because how they are later treated by others.

Climate change should be definitely solved by governments however the environmental protection is the duty of the individuals.

The respect of nature I brought from my upbringing and I passed on to my children.

Keywords

Environmental activism, litigation, Roma settlement, multinational companies, environmental pollution, respect of nature, environmental teaching

RL2_HU06, Hungary, From wild man to nature reserve guard, teaching empathy with nature

Narrative

I'm Botond, 63, father of 3 children, living my whole life in a small village near one of the Hungarian National Parks located at the Danube. I have been a nature reserve guard for around 35 years and I have been living secluded here in the forest next to the Danube in recent years since my relationship with my wife and kids has broken down.

As I say, I do not inhabit this landscape, I live it. I live this area and the floodplain management. I had a near-death experience in 1987 when I almost drowned: I was under water for 4.5 minutes and everybody thought that I would die or have brain injuries but I survived due to a fortunate coincidence of circumstances (i.e. a doctor being nearby). Therefore, I am a deep believer because such coincidences cannot exist. But I do not believe in (Catholic) religion but in the Nature; in the empathic relationship between Human and Nature. Before my accident I was a 'wild man' and I am not proud of it. I have been living in the forest, first with my father, and then alone, hunting and fishing. In 1978 an old man taught me how to catch fish with my bare own hands – I think I am the last one who still knows this ancient method in Hungary. I have built my house and made my tools myself: I am a toolmaker craftsman of profession and designed e.g., some new kinds of knives. After my accident I came into harmony with nature and wanted to professionally help the natural environment where I have lived my whole life. I have become a nature reserve guard for this protected area of 5,000 acres. Every day I patrol this area on foot, by motorcycle and boat. I live a very interesting life. I am like a policeman and have many duties. I take care of the floodplain and uphold the Law on Nature Conversation.

I hand out penalties and warnings if an offence happens in the national park, e.g., if someone walks into a specially protected area, camps or catches fish in a prohibited area, someone bathes in the summer in a protected part of the Danube, or some company or person cuts wood in a prohibited way. I used to be very tough when I started, I thought

everyone should be crucified. They told me 25 years ago that what I had done here, no one in Hungary had ever been able to do before. I paid my price for this, for instance, once they set fire to all my belongings, once I was hunted by silenced rifles, and in 1995 wood thieves caught and beat me half to death (they broke my ribs). Since I have mellowed: I am doing the same thing, but much more elegantly, subtly. You have to adapt since the nature of offences has changed: technology has changed it to an entirely pretentious, egotistical celebrity world. People living this area know me and already know that I have my whims but these are always the same, they do not change. For instance, one person who I used to give fines for illegal speedboating asked me, 'What happens to us when you will retire? Will chaos return?' But I do not plan to retire, I hope they will raise the statutory pension age. I have plans. I am working 1.5 years now to start a vlog in Hungarian and English (my son will help with the translation) about this landscape and the knowledge I have about it. I am really sorry that I did not start this 10 years ago because I was afraid of the technology even though I have been making nature movies since 1996. These were first gastro movies where I showed how to cook local dishes, e.g. fish soup. I also gave presentations, did team building, but I will now have a chance to reach much more persons.

The target audience will be water hikers, nature photographers, anglers, hunters: all people interested in nature. I will call the vlog 'A glimpse into the life and work of a nature reserve guard', and it will consist of topics related to this landscape, such as cooking, living in nature, fishing, hunting, animals, fish, surviving in nature, fire-making, tool-making, floodplain management, ways to respect the nature. I want to reach out to people who would listen to me and my ideas. I will also do live broadcasts, have question-and-answer sessions and meetings with my audience. I want to select and organise the best people in a nature protection group. I think that the biggest problem with the world today is that there are no more masters and role models; the last ones are dying out now. I had my own masters and I want to transfer their knowledge about nature. Nowadays people have no empathy with nature. Animals are living a more environmentally conscious life than the average person and I want to change this through positive 'manipulation'. I teach people to think and they enjoy this. I will correct misconceptions. For example, one of the biggest misconceptions is that people think that nature conversation means protecting our nature. Not at all. Nature conversation is the most egotistical thing; it means that we protect our own living space. Nature is fine with the invasive species. You cannot destroy nature. Conservation is actually human conservation and we sell it as humane when it is in fact egoism. Nature demands the utmost humility, empathy and respect. Nature ennobles you so much that it kills anything that is contrary to these feelings because your survival depends on it.

Quotes

As I say, I do not inhabit this landscape, I live it. I live this area and the floodplain management.

You have to adapt since the nature of offences has changed: technology has changed it to an entirely pretentious, egotistical celebrity world.



Nowadays people have no empathy with nature. Animals are living a more environmentally conscious life than the average person.

Nature conversation is the most egotistical thing; it means that we protect our own living space. Nature is fine with the invasive species. You cannot destroy nature. Conservation is actually human conservation and we sell it as humane when it is in fact egoism.

Keywords

Nature reserve guard, law enforcement, nature conversation, living in the nature, harmony with nature, empathy with nature, environmental teaching, vlog

RL2_HU07, Hungary, Finding peace in nature

Narrative

I'm Ildikó, 55, living for 30 years in Budapest, first on the streets and then in different homeless shelters. I was raised in institutional care in different towns of western Hungary after I was taken away in my childhood from my alcoholic parents. I finished primary school, I was working as a cleaning lady at different places and got married but that did not work out either because my husband was beating me. Therefore I left him and had nowhere to go but on the streets and here. We had one daughter with whom my relationship also soured. I must say that I have had quite a bad life. It was difficult to live in Budapest after the countryside since I do not like to be around many people. I was really depressed, had health problems and went into disability pension. Therefore when I am here I tend to be together only with a few people. I got re-married and have a few (3-4) people with whom we are working in the community garden outside. The community garden started a few years ago when one of the social workers developed some gardens in the backyard for all interested residents. My sister-in-law used to have a garden and I was missing the outside gardening work. I wanted to have an own garden because I want to look after myself, and I do not want anyone to interfere. I learnt in the childcare institute that we should not litter and take care of our environment but many residents here are not raised like that. They throw out their trash to the garden, and neglect their community work, e.g. sweeping. I have also already had some conflicts because of this even though I really avoid conflicts. Somebody threw out chicken bones to the cats in the garden where we were working and I did not leave this without a word. I do not want to deal with such people. They drink and feel sorry for themselves. I think that if you are sad then you should get to know your way about yourself and occupy yourself.

I tell you frankly, the garden is my happiness. Gardening relieves my nerves; it is very good and calming. When I am sad, I take myself and go down to the garden. My problem will be with the coming winter when there is nothing to do, you cannot work in your garden. I have been tending my garden for two years but once the workers destroyed it because the ramp was re-made for wheelchair users. But my vegetable garden is beautiful again: I have planted potatoes, zucchinis, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage, strawberry and we just planted radish, salad and sorrel this Saturday together with the social workers and volunteers.

Social workers have brought us the seeds we asked from them. Volunteers help us to do some physical work because some things I cannot do due to my health issues. Water needs to be brought from a more distant place and this is sometimes tiring. We all need to learn how to work in such a community garden. For example, two residents were wasting the water and social workers had to explain when (early morning and late night) and how to use the water.

We have plans for next year. We plan to establish a hotbed and to plant fruit trees next spring. I am now re-connected with my brother who lives in a Western Hungarian village and he will provide me with some trees. I would like to plant plum, pear, sour cherry, cherry and peach. I miss fresh fruits. When we get some fruits here it is usually an apple. We cooked some food together already this year and then we can also make jam from the fruits together next year. I am really looking forward to cooking together. In addition, this will also help us in economic terms because vegetables and fruits – as all foodstuff – got extremely expensive this year.

Quotes

I wanted to have an own garden because I want to look after myself, and I do not want anyone to interfere.

I tell you frankly, the garden is my happiness. Gardening relieves my nerves; it is very good and calming.

Keywords

Community garden, homeless shelter, health issues, institutional care, peace in nature

RL2_HU08, Hungary, Respect of nature through Buddhist values



Narrative

My name is Tamara, 47 and I have been living on and off the streets of Budapest since the 90s. I do not know my parents. I have been raised in an institution in a small Eastern-Hungarian town. I moved to Budapest in 1994 and finished my schools there. I am a social worker and caterer from profession. I have no family and when my identical twin sister died in the 90s I really started to use drugs and drink. First only on weekends then I started to get even more depraved. I did not care about anybody or anything, I was living from hand to mouth, and whatever money I had I spent on drugs. This ended when I met with the then-leader of a foundation dealing with the aftercare of (problematic) young adults brought up in institutional care. I had already been interested in Buddhist philosophy beforehand and the Foundation brought me in contact with a Buddhist master. I spent then 3 years in a Buddhist 'farm' where they 'cleansed' me. Before that I have been in state institutions too but that did not work, I have just become an even worse addict. I think that the essential part is that I wanted to get clean by the Buddhists and was not forced to as before. We have done all kinds of manual labour and produced everything there at the farm: I have built a tea house, dug a lake and made a pool. We planted vegetables and had donkeys, goats, dogs, chickens, ducks and geese. I have learnt gardening by the Buddhists. I like nature better than people, maybe also because of my Buddhist religion. You need to respect nature because you can command humans or animals, but not nature. How do I stop the rain for example? I have been living for 8 months in a nearby forest with my tent but now I had to move into this homeless shelter. I prefer living outside – I am freer, no one tells me when to get up, how to get up, when to go to bed, what to do. I also take care of nature according to Buddhist teachings. I do not litter or cut living trees, this behaviour disturbs me. People tend to forget where they come from and how much trash they can produce and throw away each day. The problem is that I also get into conflict sometimes because of this. I have also quarrelled with my room mate when she littered. Yesterday I caught a person cutting a branch of a healthy tree with a saw in the nearby forest and I told him to stop it and go away. He was a large man but I was not afraid of him and he obeyed me. People do nothing to preserve the forest or make it cleaner. They are apathetic and do not appreciate their situation, they do not see how the forests are a great place to be. For the majority of people it is good to take things from the other people or nature because they think that these are free. They do not even consider to give something back. I see this everywhere. I understand that people are desperate but this is also their own fault. They have put themselves to such a situation. I am not desperate also because my relationship to nature helps me stay optimistic. I have been here for only a week but I am already looking for a chance to make my own garden at the community garden yard outside. I want to plant hot peppers, paprika and tomatoes. My main goal is to plant vegetables for myself because I miss them. It does matter whether you plant something for yourself or to other people. I feel fine in my little world, and I will not let other residents near. I will also plant herbs and other plants able to withstand the winter weather, e.g. hawthorns.

Quotes



I like nature better than people, maybe also because of my Buddhist religion. You need to respect nature because you can command humans or animals, but not nature.

For the majority of people it is good to take things from the other people or nature because they think that these are free. They do not even consider to give something back.

Keywords

Community garden, homeless shelter, institutional care, Buddhism, drug addiction, respect of nature

RL2_HU09, Hungary, Making the homeless shelter more liveable through activities in nature

Narrative

I'm Szilvia, 58, living in this homeless shelter with my daughter since 2017. I have had a fight with my ex and had no other option than to move here. For 30 years I have been working at the railways but I had to leave because my health condition had deteriorated. Interestingly I lived in this same building 25 years ago when it still used to be a workers' hostel for the railway employees. I work from my room through my computer, do some cleaning at the weekends to earn around EUR 350 per month to also support my daughter because she has an autoimmune disease preventing her from working. I live on the second floor which means that I have to pay for the accommodation and services. I am wondering where we could go if this place closed down. We just discussed it yesterday that there are so many empty flats in Budapest that could be rented to people like me but they do not do it. Since I have arrived here I had some ideas to implement. There are no official format to bring forward such ideas so I keep telling them to the caretakers until they might agree. Originally the caretakers and social workers wanted to make a park in the building's backyard but I managed to convince them to establish smaller gardens instead. I think that they also wanted to make something that builds community and keeps people busy. However, this was a long process lasting 2-3 years from idea to implementation. It was important for me to have my garden and I think that we were successful in establishing a small gardening community. It does not matter where you are coming from, you only need to have a want for gardening even if nobody stands behind your back. Of course, it happens that those who could do the gardening do not want to come, and those who would like to do it cannot do it due to health reasons. Some people

are just loafing about in this place. There is no will among the younger generation for such gardening. My own daughter is also not interested in it. She has a different attitude; she is interested in computers. I admit that it would be nice if she helped me e.g. watering the plants. I wanted to have a little garden because it is good that your own vegetables can contribute to your cooking if you do it well. The garden does not grow enough for you to make a living, it just helps out, that is all. I am planting such vegetables that other people did not want and I have an organic garden. I do not use any fertilisers or chemicals. I have had butter beans, green peas, peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, zucchini, radishes, onions, strawberries, cucumbers, cauliflower – I have really harvested a lot of things from this small garden. I have learnt how to grow vegetables when I was living in the countryside. I am originally from Budapest, but I have lived in several villages where I always tried to learn the practical tips from the local farmers. You always have to use the specific characteristics of the land: if you do not know the soil it might be that you plan to plant the wrong vegetables. Therefore, I let other residents to learn from their own mistakes here but if they ask me I give them advices. For instance, I have given advice on watering, getting rid of weeds or bugs, designing of the vegetable bed. I told them my opinion and everyone does as they please. I am doing organic gardening. I will tell you, we are stupid, we humans. We are germinating, fertilising, killing the bugs and weeds, and we screw ourselves because we upset the biological balance. For instance, I will leave the weeds next to my vegetable bed where the bugs can find nourishment. I still have ideas for and beyond the garden. I plan to have paprika and maybe put a foil on it so as it can survive the winter. We plan to make a hot bed, but it matters what kind of soil we have in the garden: soil filled with red slag or normal soil. I have also floated the idea of building a petting zoo or start growing mushrooms in the basement (I have experience with mushrooms too); we will see.

Quotes

It does not matter where you are coming from, you only need to have a want for gardening even if nobody stands behind your back.

You always have to use the specific characteristics of the land: if you do not know the soil it might be that you plan to plant the wrong vegetables.

I will tell you, we are stupid, we humans. We are germinating, fertilising, killing the bugs and weeds, and we screw ourselves because we upset the biological balance.

Keywords

Community garden, homeless shelter, organic farming, practical advice, idea generation

RL2_HU10, Hungary, One of the last traditional fishermen in Hungary

Narrative

My name is Vilmos, 69. I come from a family of fishermen. I have been living in my childhood next to the river Tisza in eastern Hungary where I mastered the trade of traditional fish-catching, i.e. using nets and fish-weirs. My father had a fishing farm next to the ferry and he and his four brothers were all engaged in activities related to fishery. I helped them in all kinds of fishing activities from a very young age. For instance, at the age of 10-12 I was already sent out alone with a 6-meter-long flat-boat to the river to catch mayflies. Or I was catching whitefish that my aunt prepared as pickled fish for their village tavern. This is why I was always very interested in water and fishing, I love nature and water. I wanted to become a professional fisherman but I could not get a license. In Hungary all rivers are divided to parts where only a few people with licenses could fish in the traditional way. This was a closed group which I could not get into. So I graduated from an automotive technical school, I lived a colourful life: I was a speedway racer, a truck driver for 13 years and a boat repairman for another 13 years. While I was working in these jobs I never strayed far from fishing for hobby alone or with my family. In the 90s a fisherman suddenly died who had a territory next to the Danube and I managed to take over his territory. I completed the fishing courses and became an official fish-keeper. Over time I received the areas of other fishermen and I had around 4000 acres (70 km) by the Danube where I could legally fish with traditional methods. Even if I wanted to I could not catch one-fourth of my fishing quote since I was doing it alone only using my own tools that were mostly hand-made. This job ended in 2016 when the government banned all traditional fishing on the Hungarian rivers. The official reason was that traditional fishing caused overfishing and was done illegally. I, however, suspect that it was banned for political reasons, namely to gain the political sympathy of the anglers. There are around 830 thousand registered anglers in Hungary who all pay license fees to the state association. I admit that many traditional fishermen worked illegally or never paid taxes due to the loopholes in the system but this is incomparable to the potential environmental harm caused by the thousands of anglers who do not know much about the nature or the different types of fish. They do not care about the damage they might cause to the environment. Due to my upbringing I was always fishing in a way that causes the least harm to the environment. This mindset is gone: the nature of illegal angling has also been changed. Formerly people were doing it mainly for subsistence reasons, and while this might be still true in rural areas but in Budapest people do it for joy and experience. Their methods and technology (e.g. motorboats worth of 10-20 million HUF) have also become far more sophisticated so – while it is true that there are more fish keepers and stricter regulations than before – you cannot do anything against the environmental damage they cause. The weather is getting drier anyway, there is a lot of drought, the water temperature is rising, the water level gets lower and becomes rhapsodic. Unfortunately people destroy everything, that is the biggest problem. Man has interfered into the ecosystem, for instance stone dams were built here to divert the Danube 17-18 years ago,

but people did not consider that behind the dams the river could become silted up and fish would not be able to spawn. Nature is constantly working – if there is no human intervention the rivers would restore themselves, I am sure of it, just look at what happened after the cyanide contamination at the river Tisza. Currently nobody is really taking care of the waters, what the authorities are doing is not enough. The biggest problem in Hungary is that authorities confuse fishing with traditional natural methods with pond farming. Fish are still being stocked, but not thoughtfully, and they do not take care of their spawning grounds. So there are fewer and fewer fish in the Danube and fish has become a luxury product.

This encourages people to risk illegal angling even if they can be caught. At most, they pay the fine, but still sell the fish at a good price to shops or restaurants. This further destroys the state of our rivers. Banning fishing with traditional methods is also counterproductive. Since no official authority buys our expensive fishing tools and materials therefore most fishermen have already sold them to such people who might engage in illegal activities.

With other fishermen we have initiated legal proceedings to at least receive some compensation for our previous expenses and make the authorities buy our tools. I would need the money since I cannot be an official fish keeper any longer and had to take up a side job to complement my pension of EUR 350.

We have also organised protests and delivered a petition to the Ministry. We have received many promises but nothing happened until now. I have already accepted that traditional fishing will not be made legal again but at least they should let me be a fish keeper in a social mandate or give me license to fish invasive species. I have also recommended to introduce a similar regulation as in Slovakia when nobody is allowed to fish in breeding season. The authorities swept the idea under the carpet because it would go against their economic interest (i.e. anglers presumably would not buy new licences). I have also wanted to hand over my knowledge by organising 'demonstration fishing'. I would have organised presentations for interested people on the water where I could have showcased different aspects of traditional fishing. Believe me, there would be demand for this, but I was not allowed to do even this because it is forbidden to be near water with any traditional fishing tools.

It is a pity because the knowledge on traditional fishing methods will be thus lost. My wife and I have also five children but none of them wanted to be a fisherman. It is understandable since this is a hard and not well-paid job. Young people would rather work in big stores as stockers. This profession is dead and unfortunately there is nothing we can do about it – I wanted to fish for the rest of my life because nature prolongs people's lives. I have never been ill in my whole life. My love of nature is still the same. If I am out at night, I do not care whether I catch a single fish or not. It is enough that I can enjoy the starry sky, the good weather, the silence, the animals moving at night. You feel like you are really in the nature.

Quotes

The biggest problem in Hungary is that authorities confuse fishing with traditional natural methods with pond farming.

The nature of illegal angling has also been changed.

Unfortunately people destroy everything, that is the biggest problem.

My love of nature is still the same. If I am out at night, I do not care whether I catch a single fish or not.

Keywords

Traditional fishing, illegal fishing, river management, fish keeper, ban, regulations

RL2_PT01, Portugal, Low income, retired man who uses nature in a protected area for subsistence

Narrative

I am a 64-year-old man I am married and have no children. I was born in the town of Sintra, but I moved here, to this smaller coastal village 25 years ago.

The question of nature for me is: the sea, it is the sea. I do not fish but I gather things from the sea. I am not a fisherman, but I catch mussels and percebes, there used to be octopus but there are not so many anymore. I catch them to eat, I do not sell them. When the sea lets me, I go, when the tides allow. Now, today it is not possible, the sea is wild. I don't have a garden, but I have a "horta", where I produce cabbages, potatoes, onions, to eat. It is not to sell but to eat and to give away. I give food away to my neighbours and also people who need food, they come and steal what they need from my garden. There are people who do not have money to buy food, so they steal from my garden. I mostly cultivate my garden alone.

I think mostly people have respect for nature, but there are people that do not have civic values or respect and leave rubbish lying around. I am constantly telling people to put rubbish in the bin. But here there are lots of people who use nature to sustain their livelihoods. There are lots of people who catch fish on the coast and sell them to restaurants.

In the Natural Park of Sintra and Cascais, the protected area, we are in a bad state, for example, there is no care given to the wild, they are cutting down the pine forests, I do not know why. They should not cut down the pine trees. There seems to be no criteria there are some pine trees that are rotten, and they leave those, but cut down the healthy

ones? It seems as if they are doing this just to destroy the forest. It is difficult to understand. It might be the Civil Protection, cutting down trees to protect against the forest fires. But it is a crime to cut down trees. They cut them down but fail to clean the land, so the threat remains. The land is not cleared, for me there is no benefit it is just destruction. There is so much wood that is just wasted in this process. I use it, I collect the pinecones and the wood to make fires. In the olden days this was how we ate, cooking our food on open fires with a big iron pot. The food had another taste. People now do not do this. This is what I do. But nowadays people do not understand how to use the resources that nature provides us with. It was different when I was young. I try to keep these habits going. The authorities do not help at all. Why do they not come to the land? I would like for them to come and see the land, talk to the people. The Natural Park has museums and gardens, and everything is so clean and well taken care of, it sparkles. But why does the land and the wild not have the same treatment? For example, even after they cut down the trees, they do not widen paths or roads, if there is a fire in the middle of the wilderness how will the fire engines even get into the land. There is rubbish all over the place blocking entrance ways. This is not a lie; you can go and see it with your own eyes. Nature needs to be better protected, there are so many interests. There are investments, but interests. What happened to the money that has come from the European Union? Where has it been invested? Have they made nice gardens, organised the space? The people who are in charge of this organise this really poorly. They are sleeping, you only see them when they come to this area for lunch, they do not speak to the people.

I like it here, but it hurts my heart to see it in this state, with the sea cliffs in threat. I work as a builder, I went to France and worked there twice. I am very healthy. I have not even ever had a vaccine. The contact with nature keeps me well. The sea is really good for my health, it is good for asthma to clean out your system.

Quotes

I think mostly people have respect for nature, but there are people that do not have civic values or respect and leave rubbish lying around. I am constantly telling people to put rubbish in the bin. But here there are lots of people who use nature to sustain their livelihoods. There are lots of people who catch fish on the coast and sell them to restaurants.

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It might be the Civil Protection, cutting down trees to protect against the forest fires. But it is a crime to cut down trees. They cut them down but fail to clean the land so the threat remains. The land is not cleared properly though the old wood is just left, for me there is no benefit it is just destruction. There is so much wood that is just wasted in this process.

Keywords



Sustainable living, poverty, maintaining old knowledge, living on nature's resources, gather seafood, firewood, destruction of wilderness

RL2_PT02, Portugal, Low-income migrant, isolated in rural area without transport

Narrative

I am a 36-year-old man. I was born in Argentina, in the country, but moved to Europe 15 years ago. I first worked in vineyard in France picking grapes and treating the vines. I moved around many different wine regions. I have been in Portugal for 12 years; I am married to a Portuguese woman who comes from a farming family, and I have two small children. I am working on an agricultural project (in a village in Sintra). I have worked in agriculture for around 10 years, but started working on a new project around two years ago. I work a lot with plants, I am in constant contact with nature. I work in the area of market gardens; it is not for my own consumption but to sell. I grow rocket, salad, spinach, some roots, different things that are fast growing. We are always rotating the beds.

I have always been interested in working with plants, first I want to work in architecture but then decided to work in agriculture. It is better I like it more as I am more tranquil working outside with plants. I am always outside in nature with my daughters, normally we go walking in the hills, or walk along the coast. The protection of nature is so important for me but people here do not respect nature. Even protected areas are up for sale. I'm not sure how it works but there are many places within the protected areas where it's supposedly not possible to build and they are building. There is a new hotel (says the name of a big national chain) that has been built right in the middle of the protected area, how is it possible to build a huge chain hotel in the middle of a protected area? No one knows how this comes about or how it is possible? In the "serra"- the mountainous area- there are many new constructions in areas that are protected, it is really noticeable that they are not protecting the protected area. The only way past this is stamping out corruption. I don't have evidence but there is no other explanation. If there are hotels in protected areas, they obviously had to find ways to overcome barriers to make this happen.

There are groups working to try to protect nature, there is a group working on the Estuary of the Sado River to try to protect it. A while ago they wanted to explore a new tourism development and a local group protested against it. Normally it is tourism that exploits the protected areas people put these areas up for sale.

I work in this area because I am good at it, I like working with plants. It's honest, it's fair and square.

If you treat it well it gives back to you. You plant something and cultivate it, it provides you with good things. This related with my own philosophy, my own way of being. I learnt this by working with my father-in-law, in his vegetable plot. In Portugal, agriculture pays really bad, they hardly export anything, it pays really poorly. So, I also bring the food I produce home to reinforce our family meals to feed my two daughters.

There is a small part of Portugal that understands what it means to have a holistic life, these ideas are still not really present here. Some people due to their own conscience try to protect nature, but there is no effort or tendency at the central level to try to protect nature. When there is some big problem like exploring oil in Algarve, many people are motivated and fight against this. But it is not general.

Quotes

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In the “serra”- the mountainous area there are many new constructions in areas that are protected, it is really noticeable that they are not protecting the protected area. The only way past this is stamping out corruption.

Keywords

Wellbeing, reciprocal relationship with nature, tourism development, corruption, lack of trust in authorities

RL2_PT03, Portugal, Low-income retired man living in clandestine home

Narrative

I am 65 years old; I live with my wife and have two children and two grandchildren. I practice subsistence agriculture on a small plot within a Natural Park. I was born here and still work the land of my father.

I never was a professional in agriculture, everything I know I learnt from my parents. If that was true I would live in misery; it is only viable for those who have 1000s of hectares the small producer is condemned! The costs are too high, the pesticides, I am against them, but you can't live without them, as the insects eat everything, and it is getting worse. It is due to the lack of ice in the winters that kill the insects now we have warmer winters, now it doesn't freeze, so we need pesticides. So all the fruit and vegetables in the supermarket are chemically treated. In this area the dimension of the lands is really small, it is fragmented, there are no big landowners, so everything is abandoned. There is no livestock to feed off the grass this leads to problems with fires during the summer. My mother subsisted from two cows, but now it is only possible with 1000s of cows.... There is such an abysmal transformation over this time. I get all my information from the TV, it is not an organ to spread lies, but to spread information. My grandson will still live well but his grandsons will have to deal with the consequences of this. Now the big fashion in this area is planting vines, in the area (a small wine region within the natural park), I think this is also condemned. It is not priority, it is an alcoholic drink, it is valued by certain elites. Its 20 euros or even more expensive for a bottle. This is not the wine they sell locally in the local cafés. People who can drink this wine they are producing here is not the local population. I am part of the regional cooperative; I know this happens. These small wine cellars where wine is produced are all in risk, they can't do repairs or keep afloat. The wine sector is not viable. Now they all have to live from tourism and rent out rooms, tasting, parties. The new elite wine producers work individually and have their own cellars to produce wine.

It is impossible to replicate what it was like 50 years ago, when the wine was made by the community all contributing to the local wine that was produced in the cooperative cellar. The whole area was planted with a local grape – “ramisco”. This is not viable anymore. My generation is the one who has seen the most change.

I did not go to middle school at the time it was too far away and my father could not afford it and high school was just in Lisbon. In my generation it was a rarity for people to study. But the problem is how can we arrange jobs for all these people. My son did not study he went to the USA to mountain bike competitively. He sees his colleagues who studied and now many of them earn less than him. So, I cannot ask him to get on the tractor and clean the land, it is not viable anymore. They are not obligated to work on the land anymore.

Today I practice subsistence agriculture. I have my land where I sow turnips, carrots, cabbages, but they are not treated they are all eaten by insects. Different from the supermarket where everything is so pretty. I cannot sell mine in a shop. I have some hens and rabbits, but they are not for eating, I use their waste as a natural fertiliser.

This is also a way for me to save on buying fertiliser because now the fertiliser is so expensive. The price of herbicides has more than doubled. The small river that runs by here is almost dry so we do not have problems with water pollution. There is lots of clandestine construction, if the city council tried to demolish the clandestine housing today there would be a civil war there is so much of it. The rents are high, there would be war! People used livestock, to help work the land so there were lots of small barns used to keep bulls and donkeys that were later turned into housing for people. There are 1000s of them. But in my case it is a little different there is a law about my house that I built, if there is someone living there then they can never demolish it. However, if no one is living there the city council can just come and demolish the house. All houses that are not habitable

can be demolished, they have done this with a local family, who had their mother's house, but no one lived there. The authorities do this because of the landscape. Yet at the same time they commit such atrocities. The last thing they did was to put the rubbish collection point at a junction in the middle of the road. It is a confusion, cars cannot get passed. The technical staff in the city council are bureaucrats they work with pieces of paper but do not know how things work in reality. This should stop. They also develop projects for tourists that are not well thought out. The latest project is viewpoint and café by the cliffs. However, this is putting the cliffs at risk, as there is a part that is eroding and will fall into the sea. They put wood as a deck but this is ruined by the sea and there is no space for pedestrians to pass by.

They invested various millions on this rather than protecting the cliffs? I am revolted by this, this is the state of the country. Here down the lane they are going to build a hotel. We need people in the territory to see what is happening. There used to be more communication between different interested parties.

There is little care with the trees that are cut down everything is mechanised. In the mountainous area of the park they are clearing the land with machines, cutting the pine trees, but they destroy everything, even the small plants that are vegetating the hill. This is because they do not clean the hill by hand, everything is mechanical it destroys everything. The youth are not thinking about this, they need to be injected with this since they are little children.

Nature is completely condemned with all these pesticides, pollution, the paved roads, cars, but are we going to stop using cars? No of course not, so there is no solution.

Quotes

Nature is completely condemned with all these pesticides, pollution, the paved roads, cars, but are we going to stop using cars? No of course not, so there is no solution.

There is lots of clandestine construction, if the city council tried to demolish the clandestine housing today there would be a civil war there is so much of it. The rents are high, there would be war!

Keywords

Illegal housing, deforestation, intergenerational differences, lack of trust authorities, subsistence agriculture; small homesteads

**RL2_PT04, Portugal, Socially included,
young woman, precarious job**

Narrative

I am a 27-year-old girl, I was born grew up and still live in my family home in a really small village in Mafra (a rural area of the Lisbon Metropolitan area). I live with my father and travel to work everyday in Lisbon. I am happy with my job but would like more security. The limits of the plot of land in which my house stands border of a national reserve. I barely have any free time. Contact with nature is something that is really important to me, even though I have little time. It became more important during the pandemic. Everyone was trying to move to this area, but we were already here.... I try to be in nature as much as possible, to be in the middle of nowhere, in the valley or by the river. This was a huge escape for me during the pandemic, it was a huge discovery to go by myself into nature.

My house is really close of to that reserve, and it is impossible to build on a great part of the land. I live in an area that is as it was years ago, with little intervention. I have been working a lot at home since the pandemic, so spending time in nature continues to be one of my priorities. I like to go by myself, no one else has patience to go with me. I go through a valley and just walk, it is a bit tough as it is always descending. There is nothing there, some time I get a fright when people appear. It is something that is just mine, a way to escape from everything, the family dynamic everything. I leave my phone so there is no way to contact me. I like to get lost in nature and not know the time.

I sometimes take my dog but there are lots of wild boars roaming around so I am afraid for my dogs safety.

I like the smell. I have a strong smell memory. I like the smell of the humid land. The silence. The sound of the water. Through the different seasons it changes, I don't know what to expect. I don't know if I will be able to pass the river or not, in certain seasons it is really full. I like to hear and watch the birds, this is new to me. It is quite philosophical, I feel that nothing depends on me, my presence is indifferent to what happens.

It doesn't need me.

My house is encircled by the walls of the national reserve, there are three paths that I like to take that extend from the walls. There is a little lake with people fishing. There are so many lovely things around that I have just discovered. I go at least once a week, normally now only on the weekend. Near me now there is a forest school, it was an after-school club, but now it is an actual school based in nature. It is in a remote area, hard to get to, and the children pass their days in nature with their hands literally in the mud. The students are not just small but primary school aged children. It has a huge waiting list. It is really a different concept in the middle of nowhere it is not even possible to arrive there by car. They have to use a quad to bring supplies. I think it is so nice, they are in contact with nature they bring this home every day.

By my house there is a piece of land that isn't cultivated and it is protected so it is not possible to build. What people do is leave lorries, containers from big lorries as if it was a car park, old construction material, sofas, rubbish... I believe they will build there but something for tourism, not a house. Another aspect are the forest fires. I am so nervous about this. We had a big one in 2003 and 2005, so much of the land burned. From this point there is more control. But people in the area just don't take any care, making fires to burn rubbish at all times of the year when they are not supposed to. There are so many trees and areas with bad access, there are valleys and difficult areas to clear, and it is hard for people to do themselves or to ask other people to do it.

When I was little going for walks was something we did a lot, to pick chestnuts in the woods to pick fruit. We had a routine of going for long walks, but now I just live with my dad. He likes to run in the fresh air. Sometimes we go cycling together.

My grandfather bought two pieces of land and he gave them to his sons when they got married. When we built our house it was difficult, we had to work around different things, like there were some trees that we couldn't knock down because of the national reserve, it was also a flooding zone. My uncle wanted to build a small development on his land, but he could get a permit.

They are so rigid. Today we just have goats grazing there.

Even beside me, the house of my neighbours, who died about 4 years ago, had lost of illegal constructions around it, they didn't even have plumbing in their house. It is still in the same state someone has bought the land, but it is not possible to live in the house. There is a piece of land nearby where they are going to build around 30 houses. After the big fire in 2003 they replanted the land with eucalyptus, which is so irresponsible. It was a pine forest. It is all business and the eucalyptus are right beside the road. Even though they are going to destroy the nature with building at least the land will be clean and safer from fires and protect what there is. I will have to stop going there for walks. The lands have to be cleaned by the 19th of March, but even if people do this, they are overgrown again in May! I am always really scared with this as people don't do it, don't clean it, so it is just through the destruction of nature that we can manage to preserve it. My house was totally surrounded by flames. The national reserve is huge it takes up most of the council we have to protect it. It is the lung of Lisbon. Even with the control, this year in the heatwaves, the fires reached the area, they even prevented people from entering by cutting off the area. Many people here still live from the land a few times a week they go to the market and sell their produce. I do not have a clear opinion but it is these people who practice agriculture that light fires when they should not, it is such a contradiction that I do not understand that makes me mad. There are also some people exploring rural tourism. There are new houses for rent in the middle of nowhere, big groups of people come and walk the same paths that I walk. If it is this type of activity that they do then great, as it creates value and makes sure the land is clean! Now lots of people want to live here, the price of housing is increasing lots. As long as it doesn't go the same as Ericeira (nearby surf/ seaside resort) with all the Airbnb, as long as people respect the area and do rural tourism.

It is so important to develop the conscience that they need to protect nature, the area belongs to everyone but people just think about their own land and the difficulty with cleaning it. People need to move from thinking "Nature, and not just MY land". It is so hard to change this mentality.

Quotes

It is so important to develop the conscience that they need to protect nature, the area belongs to everyone but people just think about their own land and the difficulty with cleaning it. People need to move from thinking "Nature, and not just MY land". It is so hard to change this mentality.

Keywords

Solitary, escape, forest fires, forest school, building restrictions, tourism

RL2_PT05, Portugal, Socially included young male living in protected area

Narrative

I am 19 years old and I am currently studying for my undergraduate degree. I live close to the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve. My father is a banker, but my mother is unemployed.

My whole family is from the south bank of the river. My great grandfather and grandfather were sailors on the river and since I was a child I sailed with my grandfather on his frigate. Besides sailing with my grandfather, I also canoe individually, to explore the jagged contours of the riverbanks. It gave me more freedom. My links with the river started when I started to sail on the river at about 12 years old. Living close to the river and having a boat meant my links with the river was almost inevitable. I went on a study visit with school to the area and began to understand the flora fauna, the birds, flamingos.

The tide allows us to see the quality of the water, sometimes its foamy and white and other times its clear. I live on the periphery of village meaning we have land; I can observe the birds passing. We are self-sufficient a small vegetable garden for us to use. It helps with the family budget, lettuces they are available all year long. The rest is cultivated seasonally. How we use the soil influences nature in her entirety.

What we feel more is the danger that the big boats present when we are in the water.

From an individual point of view it is important to try not to pollute, I have already seen tires, a fridge in the river, other natural debris like canes and things like that. The central part of the nature reserve, Sambouco, produces salt, it is a smaller production now, mostly for tourism and the preservation of the salt fields. There is biodiversity in the soil, that helps with the nutrition of birds, the flamingos are white, but feed off it and turn pink.

I sail on a boat that has 7 meters, a traditional Portuguese boat, with around 21 square metres of sail.

I go out with my grandfather (aged 70+) as I don't have my license. We go where the wind takes us. We decide based on the wind. It is only when we are moving that we decide where we go. It is impossible to leave your boat to go to Lisbon. There are no infrastructures, only the passenger boats or all are paid.

A close threat results from the effect of the passenger catamarans (Montijo - Cais do Sodré connection) that sail across the river Tejo causing environmental damage. Rato

Island, in the estuary has suffered erosion due to the catamarans destroying the beach. Sometimes it also affects people who are on other nearby boats because of the tracks and waves produced, it can push boats into raised sand bed in the river and they get stuck. If it goes slow, it is fine, but the problem is if it accelerates. The plans to build the new airport on the south bank of the river could create problems due to the need to build a new bridge.

Another cause of damage is “trawling” in the “Mar de Palha” (a large basin the Tejo Estuary), to harvest clams by some illegal boats some immigrants are involved.

It is all year round. In theory it easier than catching them one by one. You have to do in it around 3 hours when the tide is high. In times past there were two “clam factories” where people went in small boats one to an island in the river to catch clams at the end of the day.

I hate seagulls. They are increasingly present in the area and have little or nothing to do with nature: they feed on food from the dumpsters of nearby municipalities and interact with spaces of the Nature Reserve and others of the Tagus River.

There is a natural equilibrium, nature will find a path, as long as we do not pollute it. The Portuguese legislation helps as it regulates the engine size of the passenger boats which protects against water pollution. Of course, its effect on air pollution is another story. There needs to be more regulation of the clams, there is such a huge production, I do not know how it is possible to harvest so much but still have so much to collect.

Quotes

A close threat results from the effect of the passenger catamarans (Montijo - Cais do Sodré connection) that sail across the river Tejo causing environmental damage. Rato Island, in the estuary has suffered erosion due to the catamarans destroying the beach.

There is a natural equilibrium, nature will find a path, as long as we do not pollute it.

Keywords

Clams, river, protection, immigrants, erosion

RL2_PT06, Portugal, Socially included woman high contact with wilderness

Narrative



I am 44 years old. I was born in Zimbabwe. My parents were immigrants there. I lived there until I was 7, I moved around South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and then moved to Portugal first to Algarve and Trás-os-Montes. I lived with my grandmother and had close contact with nature, the animals lived in the rooms underneath the house. I moved from a big city in South Africa that had McDonalds to a small village in Portugal where they still made toast in the fire and made food for the animals. I met my husband in Lisbon and stayed in Lisbon. I live by the sea as I like surf.

I live in a neighbourhood and it feels like a village. I have an experience working in allotments that are locally (run by the municipality). I like to walk with my children (13 and 4 years old). We spend so much time in the beach not only in the sunshine. We also do wild camping we never go to camp parks. We never leave the rubbish lying around even when we are wiping ourselves after necessities, we do not leave the toilet paper on the floor, even though it is biodegradable. We try to do our small part. We try to get water from the streams. We try to go to places where there is no one as here in this part of the country there are so many people and people abuse and other people pay. We are careful not to make campfires.

My older child doesn't like to go to our allotment or my husband. We don't necessarily go to the natural park as much as I would like but we would like to go more. In the past I remember seeing the debris of construction material in the national park, but now I think it has improved. In my last house I always had to call the sanitary department of the municipality as my neighbours would just throw out rubbish. They do not call and use the service. Another problem is animal excrements as even if people clean up after their animal the number of plastic bags used to do this is a real concern.

We talk about respect for nature in school but if there is no education at home then everything stays the same. I would not say it is worse than when I was younger, but it is not better. It is at home that people need to learn to recycle etc, my 4-year-old son already does this. I do not trust though that recycling is actually done by the municipal services, I have a suspicion that they mix everything. In my allotment (close to a protected natural park) I have broad beans growing, and peas, and people are always offering things at least twice a week people are giving me fruit, vegetables. In the allotment I do not trust the old people planting there, I think they are using chemicals or pesticides as I see a huge difference between the things that I manage to grow and the things that other people grow. They know that it is forbidden but they keep doing it. The younger generation is more sensitive to this issue. Now we have so much more pollution. Before there was so much more recycling in the villages people used everything, used the animals to clean the forests, there were forest wardens, this is something that we could start to introduce again especially due to the forest fires. These people were always controlling everything, taking care what needed cleaned. Also people used everything firewood, pinecones, there was nothing to buy so they had to gather things to survive. Now we have a different mentality that we cannot pollute, but since it is not a question of survival, everything is bought so we do not have this practice.

It is only moving back to a state of survival that people will change their practices. My family in the North of the country were complaining about the lack of water and there are so many crops that failed, Sharon fruit, chestnuts, etc... my uncle said if this was in the past it would be the year of the famine. Even in the city there were fruit trees everywhere, it was just a matter of picking fruit, it was everywhere.

My husband and I work in publicity, so we are working against our principles of anti-consumerism. I feel that people are suffering from a huge lack of contact with nature and it is because people do not need it to survive.

Living from the land makes people happy, but it is not for everyone. When I am in my allotment I am working the land but I do not think of anything my mind is blank. I think it is so important for people who have a mental illness.

With our groups of friends we feel a little bit like outsiders but people like and respect our contact with nature. I am not afraid to stay without everything as I always have the land. My father always said save the land as it will be treasured in the future. I still have my father's lands in the north, I want to plant chestnut trees maybe not even for my children but for the future generations. I just want to keep it and make sure no one builds on it, to protect the land. It is my little part.

I do not believe in the end of the world, we have passed through different phases, eras. We are in the era of plastic; we even have people with plastic organs. We are in the process of transition we are in a new phase. It is a regeneration of a new era, if you think about it plastic comes from nature. We have cancer, but before we had other diseases before. I am not a fundamentalist, it is a regeneration and we will survive.

Quotes

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Keywords

Wild camping, recycling, education, allotments, survival

RL2_PT07, Portugal, Anti-system retired man

Narrative

I am over 60 years old; I live in Lisbon. I have a son who is 20. I studied hotel management but retired when I was 45 to do various courses on sustainable agriculture.

There is a huge hypocrisy when we are talking about sustainability and environmental concerns, as governments do not promote products that are long lasting. I

can give the example of the iPhone - I had an iPhone 5 and then I realised that after a while it stopped doing actualizations, so my sister gave me an iPhone 8, it was working but now it does not charge. I come from an era when machines were made to last.

Humans are the biggest predators in the world, companies and policies complicate everything.

Talking about climate change is a fashion, the fact the president of the city council is blaming the recent floods on climate change is nonsense.

I did a project for ICNF (Institute for the Conservation of Nature and Forests) and I visited the protected areas, it stayed in the drawer, and nothing came from it. I do not have confidence in any institution, from city council to the IMF, the EC, I have no faith. I only have faith in me, and even then, not always. It is all prostituted. Everywhere humans reach they ruin, it is the most predatory race.

There is a treaty to protect the Antarctic, it says it is a land, but it does not belong to anyone. There is a limit for the number of tourists that can visit per year and some scientists, this is the only reason it is not ruined. Human beings are destructive. I do not believe in the system, in companies, in politicians. We are condemned to go to the depth of the well, to die so that we can be reborn. This system will have to finish so that we can reset everything, our life project, the economic system, everything. It is all related with the financial system, who has power, who controls what. No one should have money. Everyone should have a basic basket of goods for survival as there is not enough land for everyone.

I took a course in hotel management. I retired at 45 to do the course that I wanted to do, permaculture, apiculture and others. I decided to do what I wanted when I wanted it, what everyone should do but can't as they are so worried about how to pay the bills. We are here running after money to survive and in the meantime, we ruin the planet. What we produce in Portugal is not even enough for 6 months.

I know all the protected areas of the country, not just the national reserve beside me – there is an official organisation to protect nature – INCF- it depends on the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of the Economy, and it also regulates the protected areas that are also governed by the municipal councils. There are so many conflicts, they fight between themselves to see who can win what. The worst problem in terms of planning and sustainability is that the municipalities live from the property taxes, so it means that there are clear incentives for municipalities to allow more construction. If they do not have money they cannot have police, schools.... So, for municipalities who have protected areas in their remit, it becomes a problem as they want to be able to authorise construction.

Another problem is that during the pandemic, when everyone was confined, in the hills of Sintra (Serra de Sintra) there were trucks and trucks of workers cutting down trees and transporting them as there was huge demand for wood, pellets, firewood – bio-combustibles. There were so many people cutting trees – supposedly cutting down a certain number of rotten trees at a certain distance from the road – territorial planning is another farce! The costal zone is also completely full of fishermen who just leave tins, plastic bottles everything behind and the police do not regulate it. It all goes to the water. It is a huge hypocrisy.

No one thinks about the carrying capacity of a specific zone, for instance look at Lisbon. If we want to make a protected area, it should be like the Antarctic, it should be closed, people should only be allowed in without anything that might create rubbish.

Now it is fashionable to be green, it is all nonsense. I don't believe.

Rather than having long waiting lists for allotments, the municipality should just let people plant anywhere where there is free land on green roofs.

The solutions have to be disruptive. There is no other way.

Quotes

No one thinks about the carrying capacity of a specific zone, for instance look at Lisbon... they are only concerned about building a new airport. If we want to make a protected area, it should be like the Antarctic, it should be closed, people should only be allowed in without anything that might create rubbish.

The solutions have to be disruptive. There is no other way.

Keywords

Degrowth, anti-system, institutional conflicts, carrying capacity, deforestation, sustainable products

RL2_PT08 Portugal Young woman, socially included precarious job

Narrative

I am a 26-year-old woman, who lives in a small rural village near Torres Vedras in Portugal, close to a wind energy park. I trained as a psychologist and have three jobs. I live with my family on a small piece of land where I keep hens and have a small vegetable garden.

My routine is not fixed as I jump between different jobs. In my free time I try to be in the open air in my allotment, walking in the wild, in the eucalyptus forest, exercising in the wild, walking in the Parque Eólico. When I am walking, I like to observe nature, the animals, the plants. I like to know how everything works. Just the other day I found some caterpillars and I had to know what type of butterflies they would be. The insects, I like to watch ants and see how they relate with one another. My walks are not just walks I like to observe what is going on around me in nature. We can learn so much from observing how

animals organise themselves. I normally use the internet after my walks to try to understand the species that I have observed and how they develop. It makes me feel good to be in nature to observe, the smell, the contact with the energy. I could not live in a city, even when I worked in Lisbon I still lived in a rural area and the best part of my day was returning home.

My favourite places are close to the mountains, the river, even when I go on holiday I avoid the beach and go to the mountains. I love unspoiled places like the Azores - there is a lot of nature in its raw form. I am in nature various times throughout the week. If I am working at home, I go out into nature various times a day. I go outside with my cats, go walking in the forest. My allotment is really important to me even though it is small we have aubergine, beans, leeks, cabbages, tomatoes.... It is important for our family economy as in the supermarket it is so much more expensive and not as organic. The local producers are not given much value, we prefer to buy in small shops, where the products are less beautiful and perfect but cheaper. We always buy seasonal fruit this way from small producers.

It is traditional here in this area for everyone to have a little piece of land to cultivate, access is easy. Even if people don't have their own land, they ask people to let them cultivate and use their land and sometimes use it for years and years. There is solidarity, but there is so much abandoned land so it is good too for the landowners to have people cultivating their land and keeping it clean and protected. Unfortunately, there are people who do not respect nature the way they should. Many leave rubbish from construction or building work, some small companies but mostly individuals. This even happens inside the wind park, even though it's dangerous. We try to pick up rubbish on our walks. This is not new, from when I was a really small child we always saw lots of rubbish, it's a recurrent problem. People also make fires in the season when it is forbidden. In terms of inspection and regulation I really believe it is our responsibility to report this to the authorities, but even then they often do not fulfil their role. It should come from them they should educate people that this type of behaviour is not acceptable. Another problem is soil health and quality with the plantation of eucalyptus trees there are many companies planting intensively, as soon as they cut a forest, they plant new trees. The owners of the land do this cyclically. Many times, they don't take care of the land, they just let the vegetation grow and don't take care of the land. The production of eucalyptus ruins and diminishes soil quality, they should plant something else. It is a business. The main solution lies with the authorities, the municipality should have a more active role, not only in protected areas but all nature in the area. They should provide a more consistent service. Another problem is soil health and quality with the plantation of eucalyptus trees there are many companies planting intensively, as soon as they cut a forest, they plant new trees. The owners of the land do this cyclically. Many times, they don't take care of the land, they just let the vegetation grow and don't take care of the land. The production of eucalyptus ruins and diminishes soil quality, they should plant something else. It is a business. soil quality, intensive wood production, littering, local organic products

RL2_PT09, Portugal, Young female enabler

Narrative

I am a 24-year-old woman, living in a small rural village in the council of Sintra. I left school when I was 16 to study photography. Currently, I run a small shop that promotes waste free shopping and organic products in the local village. I live in a house with a garden where we produce our own vegetables. I have always had particular eating habits since I was eight. After a traumatic experience seeing a dead pig, I was not able to eat meat. My parents were respectful and I only ate white meat. Two years ago, I totally changed my habits and became vegan. My boyfriend is celiac and we had huge difficulties in finding food that met our needs, we had to order online without knowing what we were buying. My boyfriend's mother has a small traditional shop in the village. So, we thought that if the opportunity ever arose we could open a shop that would support our lifestyle. It is really following our lifestyle to provide a place with options for everyone and healthy. It is in a really small village. I grew up here and so did my boyfriend. We have lots of people from the village, or people who find us on social networks, also tourists.

I thought we would have more difficulty, older people are not so happy to try vegan food, but the young people come and buy specific meals. Many people buy ecological cleaning products, it is good for the land, not tested on animals. It is my role not to judge people but to try to encourage them, if people stop eating meat or only eat meat 2 or 3 times a week, it helps. Talking is really important, some people do not have the information to change. I have this information so I try to pass it along. Habits are so ingrained that people don't think about what they do. Here people have less access to information. We have to re-educate people especially the older people. It is interesting for them, as it is like going back to their childhood to shop without waste.

I am so lucky as we have a vegetable garden, it is the main contact with nature. I grew up with this, treating the land growing vegetables and fruit trees. We have lots of animals, that we don't kill, we take care of them. We always eat salad from the garden – we never buy it from the supermarket, it comes full of mud we wash and then use the water to irrigate the plants, we use the vegetables that are spoiled to the animals, we don't throw anything out. I learnt that nothing is rubbish. People of my generation do not have these habits, they turn on the water and let it run, food that is off can be used in other ways. My parents taught me about caring and respect. To not care for my land, makes no sense it is something foundational. It was my biggest blessing. The horta is really important to me, the beach is also really important to me. But besides the beach, I like the village, it is so rich and it is well protected. We have not had any forest fires. There is so much diversity in the village. It is really well protected. But because of the restrictions it is really hard from some people to arrange houses as it is difficult to buy land and build due to the restrictions of the Natural Park. I agree with half of the restrictions and the other half I think it does not make sense. In the village in the areas that are already with houses, there are many examples of protected land where it is not possible to build. Even though every year they alter it and give a little more or take a little more. This has been a situation that creates lots of problems for people. Also, the prices in terms of housing have

increased as this area provided a really high quality of life. The restriction result in informal building.

In places where there is already construction, I think there could be compromise with the owner of the land even to let them build but with specifications for more sustainable forms of building. In a sense meeting halfway. In other situations where building would really damage nature or the environment, or where there are no houses. If building damages a tree, an animal's habitat then I don't think they should let people build in the Natural Park The responsibility is everyone's. This is very much related with education on environmental responsibility.

Quotes

Talking is really important, some people do not have the information to change. I have this information so I try to pass it along. Habits are so ingrained that people don't think about what they do.

To not care for my land, makes no sense, it is something foundational. It was my biggest blessing.

Keywords

Building restrictions, natural park, sustainable building, environmental responsibility, veganism

RL2_PT10, Portugal, Agronomist, female producing change through community allotments

Narrative

I was born in Lisbon but I have strong roots in Alentejo. My love for the land and my studies in agronomy come from this link and from the fact that my family have an agricultural past. I did my first grafting of fruit trees when I was only 12. I am so linked to nature, I produce organic herbs, in my father-in-law's farm in Alentejo, to sell and I am a teacher in organic agriculture at community allotments for two different municipalities, which are located in a natural park. I also live near these allotments and have one that I use to produce organic food.

I did not particularly like the course in agronomy, it was very theoretical. I just started to like the course or the profession when I started to work. I began working at an office in front of the computer 12 hours per day and I knew it wasn't the life for me. I happened to see an advertisement for a farm that needed a caretaker in Sintra, taking care of the orchards, when I arrived I thought it was just to take care of the farm, but it was also to give classes at the farm. I was also on the land, giving theory and practical classes related with agriculture. Life has always provided me with this opportunity. When we decided to do our plantation, it was always with the idea to do it organically to preserve the soil, the environment and health.

I have the perfect circle as I am producer, professor, auditor, consumer... when I am teaching I try to transmit the importance of biodiversity of having contact with the land, of producing food, of paying attention to where they buy food, and the importance of producing organic food.

The farm I was at was in a natural park, but in my free time I go for walks in the natural parks. We have the allotments nearby, with the objective to be closer to the community, for our kids to have more contact with the land and nature – my kid is 6 and my friends kids are the same age and we go by foot to school and pass by the allotment before going home. It is a luxury. We know how lucky we are! We are grateful! To be the city but have contact with nature. My son can identify plants, he knows how long they take to grow, he helps with the work. We went walking in nature 2 or 3 times a week in COVID, now we go about 2 or 3 times a month. With my friend who is guide in the natural park. But every day we go for walks in the neighbourhood.

We bring picnics or bicycles. During Covid the community made an informal park in the pine forest nearby, we brought lots of slides and swings when the parks were closed during Covid. There were no complaints from the city council. Sometimes people leave rubbish lying around, but in general terms normally we don't see problems.

Since we are with the children we can't go too far, we think about the distance, add stops and eat, we normally go by 2 or 3 places that they like, places with streams, where the kids can see horses.

If we are alone, my friends and I walk longer distances.

I was worried about the allotment during the severe winter floods. It was at this time that I was planting peas and broad beans and I am worried they haven't taken. They still haven't germinated.

I had no idea how many people have needs in our local community, I give training and people even have small kitchen gardens on their verandas. There are thousands of people on the waiting lists for training in the community allotments. In Sintra they also have allotments in the natural park between 70-90 m², it is attributed depending on the size of the family. In Cascais they just do organic allotments, in other places like the natural park in Sintra, when people got their allotments they started producing using chemicals. When I arrived there to give training we tried to do the transition to organic farming. They started to understand they couldn't use pesticides and had to swap to organic fertilisers. This was a huge challenge as many of them had years of experience as they had illegal allotments in the natural park and they were moved now to legal spaces. They always used chemicals, it hasn't been easy. We have managed to convince them, when they see it working... I battle this question of the soil to keep the soil healthy and the people understand this more and more. I always say we have managed to convert another one! At the national level I think the scenario is worrying, but at the local level

there is more and more concern with getting the people in contact with nature. They are many big companies who are stopping their production to put solar panels and the amount of money that they earn not doing anything compared with a very difficult profession is notable. I know someone in this position. I think he is renting his land to a foreign company to put their solar panels.

But at the local level I think that city council should invest in allotments. The people who have allotments all tell me that it helps so much in psychological terms it helps relieve stress as they are worried that they don't have money and it has this bonus to produce their own organic food.

The idea is that there will be more allotments producing organic food inside the natural park of Sintra. The idea of the city council is to grow this sector.

This is a way for the population to help maintain the soil it is a way to have the land clean and used.

Quotes

When I arrived there to give training we tried to do the transition to organic farming. They started to understand they couldn't use pesticides and had to swap to organic fertilisers. This was a huge challenge as many of them had years of experience as they had illegal allotments in the natural park and they were moved now to legal spaces. They always used chemicals, it hasn't been easy. We have managed to convince them, when they see it working... I battle this question the soil to keep the soil healthy and the people understand this more and more. I always say we have managed to convert another one!

Keywords

Natural park, allotment, biodiversity, agricultural teaching, organic farming, healthy soil

RL2_RO01, Romania, Biodiversity problems

Narrative

I am a 71-year-old male, retired, but still working in education, on an hourly basis, at a state high school. I continue to work at this age to be able to survive because the pension is not enough. My standard of living is low and I am experiencing difficulties and financial problems. In addition, my age has started to show and I can no longer do many of the activities I used to do, but even so, I try to do everything by myself, without depending on

others (e.g., “So quite problematic because due to the low financial resources, I have to do almost all of them, that is, there are a lot of activities in a very short time.”).

I believe that nature is very important and that I am part of it, but I am disappointed by the way people relate to nature (e.g., “I feel that I am part of it”; “And I regret that very few people realise this and from here negative consequences”). I have had multiple experiences in nature and I love spending time in nature. I believe that the actions of some people in the area produce negative effects on nature. The main activities with a huge negative potential are related to illegal deforestation (e.g., “For example, the systematic way in which wood is stolen.”). In addition, the way in which plants or forest fruits are harvested is a danger to the flora but also to the fauna (e.g., “How to harvest forest plants. I saw, for example, an individual of Roma ethnicity with one meter picking device that “shaves” practically everything.”; “And the blueberry berries, but also the blueberry bushes effectively remained clean behind.”). We can identify the same problem in the case of mushroom pickers, who do not know how to pick them and when to stop picking them to ensure their appearance in the future (e.g., “I mean, many mushroom pickers do not know how to cut mushrooms. They just pull them out and then the next year they complain that they can’t find them in the area anymore. It shrinks the mycelia.”). I can state that people do not know how to pick berries or mushrooms, but also how much to pick, so as not to exaggerate (e.g., “They, people, do not know how to pick.”; “Berries or mushrooms and they don’t know how much to collect, not to exaggerate.”). However, most of them engage in such activities for economic reasons and in order to survive. Legislative prohibitions are applied selectively in certain areas in relation to deforestation. Even though it is forbidden to clear trees, some people or companies do it. Therefore, there is an informal nature of illegal state activities in the area. The current legislation is not applied, it is only discussed at a theoretical level, but in practice I think that a change is not desired, because the decision-makers do not have an overall picture. I believe that we cannot survive without nature and we must look for solutions by which we achieve a balance (e.g., “The bottom line is that we must somehow stay in balance with nature, without moving away from a civilised balance.”; “It means in physics , dynamic balance so to fall within certain reasonable limits. Do not affect nature that you depend on it.”). I realise that I only know some basic things about nature, but I have actually realised the complexity and importance of balance in nature. Due to the job I have (i.e. physicist) I was able to observe certain connections, and later due to experiences in nature I realised the complexity of the connections. More and more people use nature in ways they shouldn’t (e.g., “The way they pick berries, mushrooms, but first of all, the way they use the wood resource, they practically shave everything.”). I see major imbalances in the fauna and the way animals reproduce due to deforestation. Diversity has been reduced and major imbalances have appeared that cannot be recovered in a short time (e.g., “An imbalance. In a way, for certain parts of the fauna, for example, cervids, it would not be good if areas appear that in which are or are no longer optimal conditions for the survival of animals.”; “Conditions conducive to reproduction, but there are many today and the number of wolves, and an imbalance.”; “Following deforestation, there is no longer a multitude of plants and the diversity is reduced and so on. That is, the imbalances are getting bigger and bigger.”). In the area, poaching both in terms of hunting and fishing is quite extensive, and the reason why this is done can also be related to financial reasons, obtaining food, but I think it is also related to the lack of education in some cases (e.g., “I mean poaching activities, which is quite extensive in the area, probably the reason is also survival, but not

only, I think also education.”). Biodiversity is strongly affected because unusual behaviours occur in animals that we face more and more often in mountain areas (e.g., “Unusual behaviours occur in animals, for example, they arrive in the village in the yard of the locals, wolves that attack, increase the distances that wolves cover, for example, in one night.”; “Cervids multiply and the quality decreases. The genetic structure is probably also affected.”; “It affects how animals reproduce. For example, 35 - 40 years ago it was a rarity to see a bear with 2 cubs, now 3 cubs is common, there were also situations with four or five cubs.”). Another important aspect is related to the rearing of domestic animals in the forest, and this is done by people who should deal with the protection of these areas (e.g., “Very often especially those who work in the field of forestry, foresters, they leave their own animals in the forest, which is forbidden.”; “And this systematically.”). They should be forced to stop such activities or convinced to do so (e.g., “Well yes, that is, they are either obligated, that there are areas where this can be done, but to do it in those areas, even if they are further away.”), but this aspect implies additional expenses (e.g., “That meant the standard of living from additional expenses, security men, etc.”). Moreover, there are many dogs that guard the flocks and are left in the forests without being trained, and this also significantly affects the animals in the forest. They do these things because of society’s permissiveness and implicitly because of a lack of education. Therefore, I believe that it is not only about nature, but about how human activity affects nature. Human needs grow and change nature, animal survival conditions change and greater and greater contrasts appear, and the tension between nature and human needs increases (e.g., “And I have the feeling that it is increasing exponentially, here is the danger.”; “So not linear, faster and faster.”). People are limited and self-centred, and this does not allow them to understand the big picture and the problems we face globally (e.g., “They only look at the stories and problems around them. They do not think about nature in general, for example, the activity of the sun or a supernova in 50 years. Once the sun “sneezes”, all the networks, computer systems, banks, etc. are gone.”; “Resources can disappear amazingly quickly and sends us into the age of stone urgently and we are un-adapted”). Therefore, I believe that when a positive change comes, it will be far too late to fix anything. (e.g., “Probably in 100 - 200 years, but it will be too late, that is, the imbalance is so great that I don’t see it coming back.”) However, there are more and more people who have started to become aware of certain aspects (e.g., “Okay, I don’t really see, I mean, I don’t think I catch it myself.. There are more and more people who are beginning to understand the necessity of adapting, living in nature, as balanced as possible”; “That in 50 years to be super optimistic, let there be a change for the better.”). I believe that nature must be understood and we should intervene only when strong negative imbalances appear (e.g., “Rather left alone! We must intervene in the sense of protection with quotes, even prohibitions of some developments when imbalances occur, obviously, very large and obviously, negative.”) and these interventions should be made by teams of people who are able to foresee the consequences of human activities. So, we should protect nature, under certain conditions, keeping a balance. The solution to achieving a balance in human interaction with nature is to increase the level of education and use teams made up of people who understand the phenomenon and have different specialties. In addition, these teams should be listened to by those who lead (e.g., “That’s what I was saying, you should have first education, and second teams made up of people who understand and have different specialties in different fields, to form a team”; “Let draw some conclusions and those conclusions should be useful, that is, they should be

listened to, by those who lead. This thing is not happening, because Physicists, for example, have been talking about the greenhouse effect for over 100 years and they are talking to themselves. And so on...”). I am pessimistic about the nature of the future because I think it is too late, I notice that the changes are increasing and the deterioration is exponential (e.g., “I think it will be harder and harder..”; “I still have the feeling that it is more and more/too late, this thing is accentuated.”; “I mean this growth and damage being exponential will be very difficult to restore and very time consuming and surprisingly large resources.”).

Quotes

I feel that I am part of it (i.e., nature).

And I regret that very few people realise this and from here negative consequences.

For example, the systematic way in which wood is stolen.

Following deforestation, there is no longer a multitude of plants and the diversity is reduced and so on. That is, the imbalances are getting bigger and bigger.

And I have the feeling that it is increasing exponentially, here is the danger.

So a whole kind of education but done with the head, progressive, but systematic, that is, honest, fair and honest information and with reasonable estimates, but intelligible to everyone. That is, without technical terms, somehow super technical, but the world understands how evolution goes, for example, about temperatures or water resources, energy resources, activities in space, asteroids, comets, the activity of the sun, etc. Let it be aware of the risks.

Keywords

Balance; identification with nature; poverty; education; biodiversity problems

RL2_RO02, Romania, The importance of biodiversity

Narrative



I am 64 years old, I am a woman, retired and I have a very low income, a very small pension, even though I have worked for many years. I face multiple health problems, but I don't give up, I try to be independent and do everything I set out to do every day. Nature is very important for our survival. It provides us with many resources and facilitates our standard of living. For example, we use mushrooms from nature, we prepare them in the fall so that we have them in the winter, to have something to eat. We put them in the jar, we have various recipes. Apart from this aspect, we need wood to make the fire, to warm ourselves. We still don't have gas because the infrastructure and connection to the grid is very expensive, and we still use wood to heat us in the winter. But wood has become more and more expensive and difficult to buy, even if we are in a mountainous area. I believe that we are facing a lot of price increases and for this reason I am experiencing more and more difficulties. For me, warmth is very important, and the winter here is very cold. I have no other heating sources, except the wood-burning stove. If I were to estimate my knowledge of nature, I would say that I know neither too much nor too little. However, I am becoming more and more aware of the fact that people make fun of nature, especially when it comes to illegal deforestation in the area. Their actions are not justified, and I think that's why nature got angry with us. Too many trees are being cut down and every time I go for a walk in our mountains, I see larger and larger portions disappearing. Every time I was in nature, I tried to do no harm. I am careful to leave the place where I camp clean, not to leave waste and not to affect the surrounding fauna and flora. I believe that the main conflict between nature and humans is related to the fact that people want to use nature to get rich (e.g., "Now it depends, there are others who want to profit and make money using the resources of nature." "Yes, and steal."). Thus, they cause many harms and spoil everything that is natural. Indeed, animals should not be left in the forest unsupervised if I mean raising animals for domestic purposes. However, I agree with the presence of flocks because if you don't have a flock, you have nothing to eat. Since I was born, I took care of the animals and took them to the pasture, so that we would have food, curd, cheese, yoghurt. I don't think this activity should be banned because you don't have anything to eat (e.g., "Banning these activities wouldn't be good, they're good because you have something to eat."; "What would be the alternative, powdered milk?"). If a man has two cows that graze in certain areas, I don't think it's a problem. I believe that in the future things will change for the worse. If they continue to cut down the trees at the rate they are doing now, the animals, plants, birds, all the flora and fauna will disappear and implicitly we, the people who live in this area, will be affected. In addition, more and more wild animals have ended up in people's yards and on the streets, looking for food because their habitat has been destroyed (e.g., "plus we're going to wake up with wild animals in the yard."; "There are so many cases.. and in Câmpulung we woke up with the bear on the street."; "Also, the bears also attacked the animals in the households, there were many cases."). I believe that nature should be protected, including wild animals, and the authorities should take care of stopping deforestation or poaching in the area. However, I believe that the people are most responsible for what is happening and the foresters from the Forestry Area who should watch over the forest and nature (e.g., "People and foresters from the Forestry Area."; "Yes, the people who have expertise in this field and should deal with it."). The government does nothing in this regard, even if on paper there are many projects in this regard (e.g., "And from the government, the governors are relics, they sleep there. Too few are concerned with what is happening to nature."). Nature helps me survive. For example, I use some herbs for tea or for natural remedies when I have

certain pains. Some resources in nature I use for food in certain seasons (e.g., autumn mushrooms or forest hazelnuts, blueberries), but they do not help me save money significantly (e.g., “But it is a saving, but not so significant.”; “Yes, let’s say 25%”). However, I prefer to go to nature to breathe fresh air and recharge my batteries, to enjoy the peace. Also, I would contribute to the protection of nature, if I had the means and if I had power from a social point of view (e.g., “I would ban the cutting of the forest, I would ban the mess.”; “I would apply more fines.”). I would be concerned to see that the legislation is implemented, and that people actually protect nature (e.g., “Sanctions, therefore, not of these, only on the papers put.”; “Yes, because even now there are actions and it is prohibited in present to exploit nature, but in vain.”). I think I could do a lot, but I think it’s in vain, my actions wouldn’t be that important. I am pessimistic about the future generations due to the fact that the education system is shaky. Moreover, they will destroy nature because they do not know how to behave in nature, they are not educated. In order to still have a share of nature’s resources, future generations should be educated, and this should start from parents and later be continued in schools (e.g., “It depends on them how nature will be in the future, on the generations which will also come from their actions.”; “Educate, first of all, to start the education from the parents and then to be continued in the schools.”). I believe that people from the village, from the countryside know how to better use the resources in the environment, to protect them, unlike those from the cities who started coming more and more often to the mountain areas, to make their guesthouses and villas. Village people grew up in nature and had to understand it in order to survive. Grandparents taught us from a young age, in the family, how to behave with the environment and how to use resources carefully, so that they reach us. They also explained to us how to pick certain berries so that we can find them next year, in the same areas.

Quotes

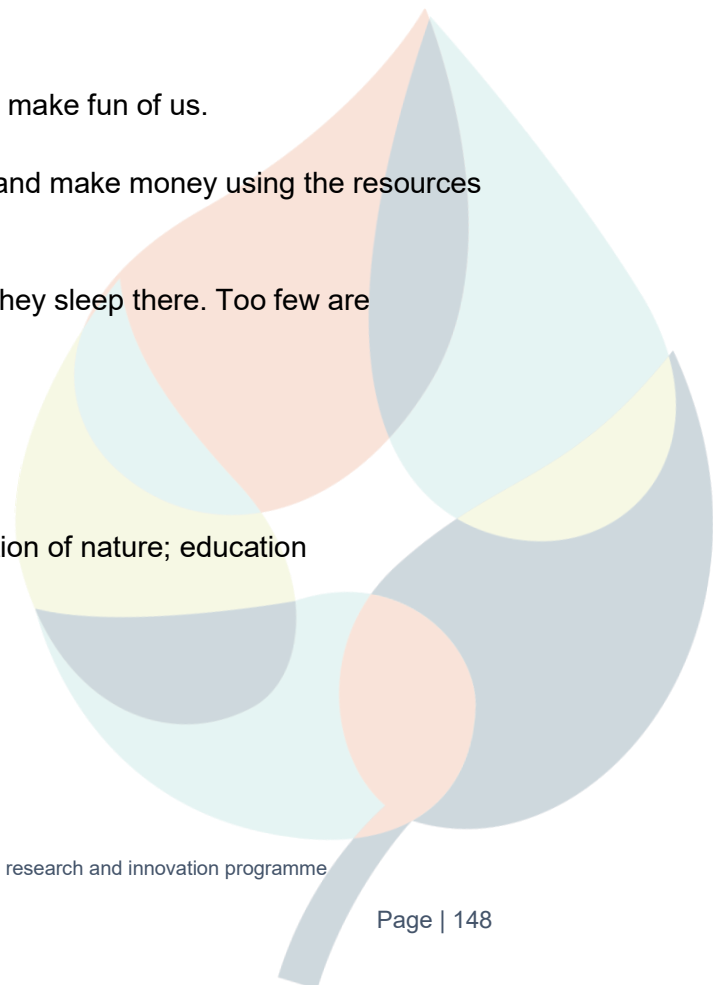
Nature must be protected, if we don’t protect it, it will make fun of us.

Now it depends, there are others who want to profit and make money using the resources of nature.

And from the government, the governors are relics, they sleep there. Too few are concerned with what is happening to nature.

Keywords

Responsibility; care for nature; deforestation; protection of nature; education



RL2_RO03, Romania, Biodiversity and resources - let's leave nature alone!

Narrative

I'm a 62-year-old retired male with a medium to low standard of living. As I am retired, I am looking to do various activities to supplement the income I have. All the work I do in my daily life, from morning to night, is in nature, and I can say that I use nature to live. I can say that I take a lot of things from nature, depending on the season, that I use. For example, I get a lot of plants, mushrooms or fruits, and I could say that the whole resource base is in nature. I believe that in our area people know how to use natural resources in an efficient manner, but there are other areas in the country where we have noticed that people have behaviours that produce negative effects on the environment. In addition, I always try not to destroy anything in nature and leave it as it is (e.g., "I always try not to disturb nature. I don't know how positive or negative my behaviours are, but I try not to disturb nature and I leave it as I find it."). I believe that there are no conflicts between man and nature or between the needs of people and nature (e.g., "There are no conflicts between man and nature.") because these conflicts are artificially created. I am of the opinion that people who live in nature and for nature have no way of conflicting with it. Moreover, I believe that nature never forgives you (e.g., "Because nature never forgives you.") and we must understand very well our role in relation to it. People's behaviours should change in the sense that they should not interfere with nature and let it take its course (e.g., "Well, I think the most that can change human behaviour is not to interfere with nature, to leave her as she is, as she is."). Nature has a restorative capacity and I don't think it should be protected, in the sense that it restores itself and does not need human intervention in this regard (e.g., "No, because it protects itself and restores itself and its follow the course."), because they could have a negative impact (e.g., "Any human intervention in nature is destructive."). Environmental activists do not help to protect nature because they do not understand the principles of its operation and do not have connections with specialists in the field (e.g., "Yes, so they do not have connections with specialists in the field and do not understand the phenomenon very well."). I have not met any documented environmental activist who understands a certain phenomenon related to biodiversity in the area and how species and plants coexist (e.g., "You will never, ever, see a well-documented environmental activist, let his mind be with him, or if you ask him about something, let him know, he has a poem prepared from an office or I know where from home, like that, and with that he goes and repeats it endlessly, unfounded."). The resources in our area are sometimes used by certain categories of people to earn money or to survive (e.g., "But on the other hand, it's a resource, it's a means of income, it's a game of survival for those who do to stay."). From the picker's perspective we have to understand that he needs some money and does various picking activities (plants, mushrooms, berries) because he wants to earn money. Sometimes these aspects are done on an industrial level, in large, organised groups and can produce disastrous effects on nature. Thus, if we want to industrialise or export natural resources, then this can lead to imbalances in nature (e.g., "It's a practice, but we have to look at this thing from 2

points, one from the point of those who gather, of the gatherer who earns some money, they go for money, and we have to look at it from the other side, that of nature conservation, which is not a good thing.”). On the other hand, I believe that raising animals on the mountain brings benefits, and the presence of herds on top of the mountain or in nature reserves does not significantly affect nature. I think that grazing in the forests is a very good thing because it helps restore the flora and does not destroy it (e.g., “Raising animals on the mountain, in general, leads to the restoration of the flora and does not destroy it.”; “Because the animal knows how to choose the food.”). Over time I have noticed certain areas affected by people’s actions, but I think we still have a balance. I believe that future generations should learn to respect nature and be trained in this regard from a young age, in schools (e.g., “Educated from a young age, from kindergarten, from how to take the first step, how to break the first thread of grass, as he probably sees the first leaf from a tree.”). In this way, the educated child when he reaches maturity will be on the side of nature.

Quotes

Because nature never forgives you.

Well, I think the most that can change human behaviour is not to interfere with nature, to leave her as she is, as she is.

Any human intervention in nature is destructive.

Keywords

Natural recovery cycle; environmental optimism; use of natural resources; economic motivation; education

RL2_RO04, Romania, Industrialization and consumerism affect biodiversity and nature

Narrative

I am a 40-year-old male, employed in the art field, and I consider myself to have a low standard of living due to the inflation we are experiencing these days. Whenever I have the opportunity, I climb the mountain, especially in the Bucovina area, and do various

activities in the forest, such as hiking, relaxing walks or going mushroom picking. I prefer to go to certain areas of nature where man has not intervened, and things are untouched. I usually travel by car, as much as the infrastructure allows, and afterwards I walk in different natural areas. Walking in nature recharges me, relaxes me, and helps me organise my thoughts and ideas. I feel healthier after spending time in nature, and I feel like I'm breathing better. I believe that I am an integral part of nature and I believe that I should respect it, just as I believe that it respects us and offers us a multitude of beautiful things (e.g., "I should still be an integral part of nature, so I respect that as I think she respects us."). I take a small souvenir from nature, if I have the chance, I pick mushrooms or berries, depending on the season I go (e.g., "Interesting things, a pebble or things like that as souvenirs, but in general, apart from picking mushrooms, blackberries or I don't know what other berries are at the time I make that trip. No, no, I do not take other things."). I frequently visit the places that are in my proximity and I prefer the areas that have a lot of greenery, fauna and flora, but I very often visit Rarău Mountain. I prefer to spend my time in the heart of the forest or in the heart of nature when I make these visits and I look for locations that allow me to do this, but that respect the legal provisions in force, but are in the vicinity of beautiful areas. I believe that we could not survive without nature because in it we find almost everything we need, and we are an integral part of it. Humans exploit nature and produce negative effects on it (e.g., "Yes, from storing waste through forests, mountaintops and so on in all kinds of natural or man-made recreational areas ... using cars in protected areas"), and some behaviours they do, either consciously or unconsciously, are due to a lack of education (e.g., "Yes, I could not generalise, but there are still areas where garbage is thrown, usually the areas where they stay for a longer period of time people, garbage, more garbage is collected, but this kind of mess comes mainly from woodcutters."). There are the problems of waste dumped in the forest and illegal logging that is common in this area. I try not to affect the smooth running of nature and to respect the routes specially intended for tourists, both for my own safety and for the safety of nature (e.g., "I try, however, not to start looking through the hollows for animals or disturb the smooth running of nature, so to speak, when I pass through a certain area. I usually use the paths that are recommended for my own safety, but also for nature's, that is, I try not to have a negative impact."). I believe that nature belongs to all of us, but there are certain companies that have started to use natural resources to obtain income by abusing certain resources (e.g., "Yes, unfortunately there are certain sources of nature that are grabbed by certain companies, thing which is not exactly right. Of course, nature belongs to all of us."). Thus, people only think about their needs, and these have become exacerbated by commercial needs or market demands from an industrial perspective, and thus we waste a lot of the natural resources that we have. I believe that isolated actions done by certain local people in the community, such as grazing or picking some berries (which might be beneficial to certain areas) do not have that much impact on nature, compared to the impact of industrialization and consumerism. I think that improving access to certain natural areas could lead to better maintenance of these areas (e.g., "First of all, access, but obviously, this does not mean, as I said, to have blocks in the middle of the forest, but access to the area respective to be much better and more accessible and better maintained."; "There will be more accessible areas for nature tourists."). I believe that the development of infrastructure in more natural areas would lead to a decongestion in areas where this infrastructure already exists, a fact that makes most people want to visit them (e.g., "Which are not necessarily nearby, I think it would

relieve a little more congestion in certain areas, because if only certain areas are accessible, most will go there.”). This overcrowding that occurs only in certain areas where there is access makes the experience in nature not pleasant and contributes significantly to the deterioration of the natural environment (e.g., “possible waste thrown by people.”; “possible accidents, as I said, that can be people who are more extremist”; “They set fire to trees, cut in areas where they are not allowed, break branches, scare animals, that is, when there are many more people, the chances of a negative impact are greater.”). Without nature we cannot survive, and we humans, together with the authorities, should help to a greater extent to protect the environment (e.g., “I said that the authorities should help to protect nature, on the one hand.”), but unfortunately, the authorities are not involved enough (e.g., “We would like to do it as correctly as possible, but the authorities are not helping in this sense either.”). This industrialization led to the disappearance of some natural reserves, where hectares of forests were deforested, many areas were contaminated, through the garbage pits made on top of the mountain and many creatures living in the forest disappeared (e.g., “So on the one hand we have industrialization and we have the commercialization”; “Hectares of forests on one side and on the other, we have garbage pits in the area in the middle of nature at the top of the mountain, which obviously can contaminate the entire area, not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also the experience, the smell and so on, but also the living things that live there... the waters, to everything, the fauna and flora will be affected.”). I believe that the people from this community do not represent a danger for this area through the subsistence activities carried out, but the problem is industrialization (e.g., “I believe that on the territory of Romania and these mountainous areas, people have been there for thousands of years and yet we have not had deforested hectares, we had forest trees, we had mountains, we had a flora and fauna, people warmed themselves with wood, so the problem is not here. The problem is with industrialization, the wood that reaches furniture, or I don’t know where it is still used in industry.”). Foreign companies took advantage of the low standard of living of the locals and convinced them to use more resources than they would have needed, people being convinced of the short-term benefits (earning some money to ensure daily living), but on in the long term we all suffer, with the disappearance of natural resources. Over time, the people in this community took from nature exactly what they needed, and I think it was somewhat of a balance, but other external factors appeared that destabilised this balance, such as various companies established in the area which aim to obtain income from the exploitation of resources (e.g., “Yes, unfortunately there is a problem here that destabilised this balance. Companies came from outside that took advantage of the low standard of living in the respective areas.”; “They lured them, let’s tell, the locals to use more resources, in this case let’s say wood, so they cut down much more than they would have needed for this apparently major benefit, but in fact in the long run we all suffer when we see that there are no more forests and obviously the other animals in nature too.”).

Quotes

Yes, unfortunately there are certain sources of nature that are grabbed by certain companies, thing which is not exactly right. Of course, nature belongs to all of us.

So on the one hand we have industrialisation and we have the commercialisation.

Yes, unfortunately there is a problem here that destabilised this balance. Companies came from outside that took advantage of the low standard of living in the respective areas.

Keywords

Industrialisation; consumerism; integral part of nature; exploitation of resources; infrastructure

RL2_RO05, Romania, Respect the nature and biodiversity

Narrative

I am a 60-year-old woman, retired, with a low to average standard of living and I have a few health issues that I am trying to get under control. I am a great lover of nature and I try to enjoy as much as possible everything that nature offers me, all its beauties, especially the area where I am. I believe that the development of infrastructure in certain natural areas has made certain areas more accessible, but for me this is not a joy because it is at the expense of nature. I no longer dare to go to the areas where I used to go in my youth because they are extremely crowded, and we can no longer enjoy the peace we used to have (for example on Rarău Mountain). I go quite often to certain areas that I like to enjoy the quiet, the fresh air and the view. When I go to nature I want to enjoy everything and I don't intend to go with the aim of taking something from there, but in certain seasons if I find for example certain plants or mushrooms when I go I collect them in a small amount like to remember their taste (e.g., "It depends if it's spring or summer, you want to pick flowers, you want to find mushrooms, but not necessarily. I never go to the forest for this purpose because I like the forest, no I go with demands and that's how I always find what I need. I feel that the forest rewards me."). I have a ritual when I go to the forest that I follow every time. In this sense, every time I go to the forest, I like to thank her and try to communicate with her, as a form of respect (e.g., "And I always thank the forest, always. I don't know why, but I made such a ritual and I think it's good if we do this thing as a form of respect."). I believe that we cannot survive without nature, and I believe that we still have a lot to learn from it (e.g., "Nothing can be done without nature. We have a lot to learn from it, a lot."). There are people who need to warm up in the cold season and there are so many scraps in the forest, and they can use it from there or people who live in a

very small space and feel the need to find a patch of forest to relax. In our area there is a very big problem with the way the forest is cut. In the areas where I used to go to visit in my youth and I still go to visit them today, there is no forest anymore, everything is cleared (e.g., “You can’t imagine how much cleared forest I found.”). I saw with my own eyes how the wood was cut and carried in the forest, and I even tried to ask why they were doing this and was told that it was none of my business. In addition, the people who exploit the wood in the area are dangerous, you don’t know what their intentions are and lately I have heard of many cases where there have been aggressions in this regard against those who tried to protect the nature or the trees to be cleared. We haven’t been going very far in the woods lately because of the bear warnings of the last few years. I believe that this has become problematic because it has been a lot of deforestation and they have found spaces conducive to development, but also due to the fact that when people go into the forest they leave garbage and all kinds of debris, affecting its food area, the bear can no longer find food that he needs and comes to the village to look for (e.g. “First of all, if they cleared so much they found spaces. His food area has narrowed, he can no longer find what he needs. Then, the man goes to the forest and gathers raspberry, affine, shoot the deer, and worst of all, it leaves garbage. The bear found that garbage, those scraps of food, and said it was easier to look for them. That’s how they ended up down the streets of Câmpulung and we just woke up one evening with a bear alert in the neighbourhood.”). The main conflict between nature and human needs is related to human greed and the lack of responsibility on the part of some who do not think about the youth, young children and future generations who should also enjoy nature and the same resources that we have enjoyed and us (e.g., “Only human greed and irresponsibility, because they do not think at all about those who come, about the young people who are in the present, about the little children, my grandchildren and they must enjoy nature, not cut down forests...”). I think that everything that happens to the climate and to nature is the fault of man who is selfish and wants more and more, seeks to earn as much money as possible, not being interested in what he leaves behind (e.g., “Man is selfish and wants more and more much because of greed, more and more money, how much, not caring about what is happening around, what is left behind, what impact does, for example, cutting down forests have... They were and are just businesses, nothing else.”). I believe that a major problem is related to the garbage that exists in nature and on the banks of mountain waters, which pollutes kilometre's around. I believe that the authorities should not allow people to cut anything from the forest. I know that many people in the community cannot afford wood-burning boilers, and people in our area have always used wood, but with a sense of responsibility. I often wonder what I could do in this regard and what would be the best solutions to protect nature (e.g., “Ok even my grandson asked me, grandma, why did you let them- Do they cut them (the oaks) down? There were acorns there. Why did you let them cut them down? I mean, I couldn’t do anything, I couldn’t fight them... and I went and thought, look, the child was right, why didn’t I do anything, what could I do in the future?”). The law is not enforced as it should be because we don’t have people with a sense of responsibility, and most turn a blind eye when confronted with the major problems in mountain areas related to deforestation and the disappearance of protected species (e.g.,

Quotes



It doesn't apply, it doesn't apply the law like that as it should be, because there are no people with a backbone and everything that happened at this level was directly related to the Romanian State, so the people at the top who closed their eyes to what happened in all of Romania and in the mountainous areas.

And I always thank the forest, always. I don't know why, but I made such a ritual and I think it's good if we do this thing as a form of respect.

Nothing can be done without nature. We have a lot to learn from it, a lot.

Only human greed and irresponsibility, because they do not think at all about those who come, about the young people who are in the present, about the little children, my grandchildren and they must enjoy nature, not cut down forests...

Keywords

Responsibility; deforestation; mentality; pollution; education

RL2_RO06, Romania, Different connections with nature

Narrative

I am a 30-year-old single mother with a low standard of living, currently employed as an art designer for a private company in the area. I consider that I live with nature in a symbiosis and have a special relationship in this sense with it, trying as much as possible to respect it and not interfere with normal natural cycles (e.g., "I have a personal relationship with nature because we live like this in - a symbiosis - we respect each other. I reap its rewards and at the same time, I try as much as possible not to interfere with the normal natural cycles, in the sense that I respect it."). I can say that I use nature for recreational purposes, and I try to spend as much time as possible in the natural environment to enjoy the clean air and the silence of the forest (e.g., "And I don't throw garbage in the forest. I respect nature, I like to walk, I like to enjoy nature as much as possible, and I need this because I work in an office, and I need to go out into nature periodically and connect with it."). My visits to nature are quite frequent and represent outdoor therapy for me, and whenever I have the opportunity, I go hiking only in places specially designed for this purpose. Sometimes I go picking mushrooms or berries in the area, but not because I need them to survive, but for pleasure, and I learned this since I was a child (e.g., "More for pleasure, not necessarily out of a need, during the summer, I

go picking mushrooms and berries, but not necessarily, so as not to fill the pantry with them out of a need, but out of an ancestral pleasure that I learned as a child.”).

Because I am passionate about phytotherapy, I sometimes take medicinal plants from nature, such as St. John’s Wort, Cuckoo’s Wort, mountain Arnica, but I avoid picking plants that are protected by law. However, I believe that there are people who use environmental resources to make money from it, mostly seasonally, and this practice is sometimes much rewarded (e.g., “I think there are people who do this, there are people who actually make money from it. Seasonally, for example, this summer arnica was collected in the area for collection.”; “So not only mushrooms for collection or berries. There is a practice of collection for medicinal plants as well, but I do not do it for this purpose.”). Therefore, there are people who really need a seasonal job and use it to supplement their income (e.g., “And there are people who really need a seasonal job and use it to supplement their round off the income.”; “Ok, so does mushroom picking which, depending on the frequency and how well they do in that year, they are paid more or less generously.”). I believe that I can survive without nature and use only what our current system has, without taking resources directly from nature (e.g., “I use what our system has, and we can eat and drink water, without necessarily use nature directly.”). However, I believe that there are people in this area who do not believe that they could survive without what nature offers them, but there are some limits mentioned in the law regarding the collection of benefits from nature (e.g., “But I believe there are people in the area, where I live, who really, perhaps could not survive without what nature gives them.”). Humans can also connect with nature in a destructive way, taking actions that pollute and destroy resources. For example, in our community there is a problem related to illegal logging, but also other actions related to the collection of plants protected by law or poaching in the area (e.g., “We don’t take into account the fact that there are wild animals that need food. We collect rubbish from nature, we collect plants that are protected by law. We do poaching, and another harmful aspect in the community is related to illegal logging.”). In the area where I live, deforestation is uncontrolled, and this has also led to other phenomena, such as floods that did not exist before in our mountainous area. There are other practices that can affect biodiversity in protected areas, such as animal farms, but there are legal regulations that theoretically prohibit this, but I do not consider grazing in the area to be a problem, and the phenomenon of transhumance has been around for a very long time in the area (e.g., “I don’t necessarily see grazing as something bad, I don’t know to what extent.. not to confuse the traditional practice of shepherding with the animal farm in the forest.”; “...I think that the animal farm is a thing harmful to nature”). Therefore, if pastoral practice is done in harmony with nature, I personally do not mind. On the other hand, I am convinced that the presence of people in natural areas affects wild animals (e.g., “First of all, wild animals are affected by the anthropic presence that has risen more and more in altitude”), and this has led to an imbalance, especially if we were to refer to the problem of bears in the area. Since man is so present in nature and does not take into account the boundaries, wild animals began to seek their resources in anthropogenic areas. The conflicts between nature and the needs of humans arise from our need to evolve technologically and from the systematic distance from all that is natural, a fact that makes many people no longer appreciate and understand how nature works (e.g., “We don’t care anymore of the natural balance and we no longer take into account the fact that, however, being human and living on this planet, where nature is everywhere, in fact, we are no longer connected to it.”; “If there is an imbalance in nature, we cannot we

expect nothing but imbalance in ourselves, because the air we breathe is also breathed by animals, and trees, and so on, but we are the influencing factor in the present.”). We should understand that we are not separate from nature and that it is our own home in the community we are in, but we should raise the awareness of those who do not understand that nature has its own rhythm and to recover it is necessary more longer than we think, because the impact of our actions is much greater than we have the impression at the moment (e.g., “Let’s be aware of the fact that we are not separate from nature and lobby more in this sense, not to pollute and if we want to enjoy nature, really, to take care of it, to take care of it as our own home in the community, to be aware of it.”). The factors that hinder the protection of nature are related to the way in which legislation is implemented and offenses are enforced. I am convinced that people can be educated to respect nature by improving the current legislation, but also by the way we are educated (e.g., “Probably it needs to be improved if it cannot be respected or does not help improvements occur faster, but not only the legislation, but also education, the way in which we are educated. But in the end, the law also educates, the system.”).

Quotes

I have a personal relationship with nature because we live like this in - a symbiosis - we respect each other.

First of all, wild animals are affected by the anthropic presence that has risen more and more in altitude.

We protect our life, nature is life on earth, and we are part of it. We are connected to it whether we want to, whether we don’t want to or whether we are aware of it or not.

Keywords

Awareness; respect for nature; deforestation; boundaries; education

RL2_RO07, Romania, The nature is life

Narrative

I am a 61-year-old woman, working in insurance field, with an average standard of living and somewhat good health because I am experiencing some difficulties. I believe that nature relaxes you and helps everyone to disconnect because it changes the rhythm in

which we work and live our daily lives. Most people after an intense period of activity want to disconnect and choose nature for this. When I walk in nature, I hug the trees, I enjoy the fresh air, the greenery, and the song of the birds, regardless of the season I am in, but I like to go to the forest the most. When I go in nature I am accompanied by friends, work colleagues or family members, usually in various groups or associations. When I go into nature I don't like to destroy what God created and I believe that there are certain things that should stay there for a very long time for our health and the health of the planet (e.g., "No, I don't like to destroy what I find created by God and are things that should stay there for a very long time for our health and ultimately for the health of the planet."). Sometimes I pick up things that have fallen on the ground, but I don't break or pick up other things (e.g., "As a rule, if I pick up something that's fallen on the ground, I don't pick up things, I don't break anything that's in nature, so I don't spoil anything from what I find there. If I take an acorn or something that's already on the ground and I don't pick mushrooms or other berries."). I don't go to just one place very often, I try to vary the natural areas I go to, I go by car, and I try to stay in areas as close to nature as possible. I believe that we cannot survive without nature because it provides us with everything we need and provides us with many resources that help us. For example, the trees that help me breathe oxygen and clean air, the lakes that are populated with various species of fish in our area, and I am a big consumer of fish, as well as I like berries. Therefore, there are many things in nature that help us survive, starting from the clean air, to all the food that she gives us (e.g., "I don't use wood for heating, but I am a big consumer of fish and that I am delighted that we have lakes, ponds, full, populated with various species of fish that live in our area, and I like berries, so there are many things that we feed on, starting from the fresh air and the other things that we feed on of nature."). Regarding the way people use wood in this area, I mention that some use it for heating, and for this they usually use trees that have to be removed to clear the forest. However, in the area there are also illegal cuttings that I do not agree with (e.g., "Because the forest is life, it is also our life that we breathe from it to live, it is life and because there are hundreds, maybe thousands of species of small beings, insects, small animals that live in that environment and for whom, through these abusive cuttings, the entire ecosystem is turned upside down, not to mention the other risks related to heavy rains, floods, landslides."). Illegal cutting is done for financial reasons because some want to get rich. In addition, there are areas where people live from nature, from what the forest and the mountains offer them, and then these abusive cuttings produce great imbalances for the community. In addition to abusive cutting, we observe the fact that people leave a lot of garbage when they go in nature or make fire in undeveloped spaces. The main reason for this negative behaviour towards nature is the lack of education (e.g., "I could not say for everyone, but there are certain people who think that they do such behaviours mainly due to the lack of education or maybe just the moment of fun, without to be aware that some imbalances can occur as a result."). I believe that tensions and conflicts between nature and people's needs arise when other forces outside the community intervene that have other goals and come into the area to use natural resources to make a profit or to produce export goods (e.g., "...as long as in those areas, where people lived from nature and from what nature offered them and no other forces outside the community intervened, things proceeded and will proceed normally"). The people of the area use the natural resources in a balanced way and produce for themselves very small quantities for consumption. But when there are groups aggressively harvesting out of the desire to make money from this, imbalances occur

(e.g., “When all these things are aggressively harvested and only from the desire to make as much money as possible from this thing, the imbalance intervenes.”; “There are trees, probably, which in the desire to be picked the berries are broken, and they cannot produce the same fruits again next year.”; “There are places where mushrooms grow, where in the year next they will not grow if they are harvested in an aggressive and abusive way and fishing, which also, if poaching is done or inappropriate methods are used, the fish in the area will disappear in time.”). I believe that humans have always lived from nature, since the beginning, we fed on nature, and it actually gave us life. For example, grazing is among the first jobs that existed in the area and has brought many benefits, both to nature and to man. The moment we abuse nature and its resources, it will no longer help us because it does not have time to regenerate (e.g., “Humans have always lived from nature, that is, from the beginning they have lived from nature because nature feeds us, it gives us air, nature gives us water, nature actually gives us life.”; “And then, if everything is balanced and consumed balanced, it is normal that nature will give all these resources.”). Just as we take care of our personal possessions, so should we take care of the forest, take as much as we need, thinking that next year, someone else should find those things in the area where you were (e.g., “So never take too much, take as much as you need and be careful to think that next year someone will have to find those things”; “So we must take care of nature as we take care of our personal belongings.”). People from mountain areas or people who grow up in natural areas know how to protect nature and behave with it, but those from urban environments should be better trained and better prepared when they get to nature to understand that must respect it. Specialists, together with all of us, should protect nature, what God has gifted us with, in this beautiful country that we have, which is a corner of heaven. In addition, I believe that people who feel more entitled to do so should be more active and present in areas where hunting or fishing is not controlled and things are done abusively (e.g., “First of all I think that those who are entitled to do so, those who should be more active in those areas.”; They should be a little more present in areas where hunting is not controlled, where fishing is not controlled, where all things are done abusively and aggressively.) I think environmental activists can’t keep up with those who want to destroy and do bad things. There are still not enough people involved in such actions to protect the environment. I am of the opinion that the fines are very small, compared to other countries that have reached a level of civilization in terms of protecting nature through coercion and very large fines (e.g., “And then things would be much better, so the fines should to be drastic and probably, with time, the world would become much more aware of the negative effects”). The barriers in protecting the environment are made by us, those in the field, who should be much more involved and active. Nature is generous with us and if we take care of it, it will continue to be generous, but I believe that there are not enough people engaged in such activities. We need more civic education, education in schools and training among children to protect nature.

Quotes

So we must take care of nature as we take care of our personal belongings.

Humans have always lived from nature, that is, from the beginning they have lived from nature because nature feeds us, it gives us air, nature gives us water, nature actually gives us life.

Keywords

Balance, personal responsibility, education; adaptation; recreation

RL2_RO08, Romania, The lack of education, responsibility and the changes in nature

Narrative

I am a 54-year-old woman with an average standard of living, relatively good health, and I work in education. I live at the foot of the mountains, right at the edge of the forest, and I can say that I live in the middle of nature. When I go to nature I do it recreationally, to relax and at the same time I go to clean and pick up the trash left by others (e.g., “In nature we look at its beauties, relax and pick up all the craziness that others leave in nature. We try to clean up as much as we can.”). I notice that there is more and more mess in the forest and more and more garbage thrown by people. I take the herbs I need from nature and pick mushrooms when they are in season (e.g., “I go near here and pick herbs, I have them in exactly two minutes, I pick also mushrooms when I find them”). My grandmother taught me how to harvest herbs and use them as natural remedies for healing. Natural resources help us a lot as long as we know how to use them, but unfortunately most of us don’t really know how to do this. People who irresponsibly consume environmental resources don’t know much about nature and don’t know enough, especially the youth (e.g., “Lack of carelessness and I don’t think they know much. No, I don’t know the youth... especially now, probably there is still a little work to be done at school.”). I often go to the forest alone or with my husband because it gives me great pleasure to enjoy everything around me, especially since I am used to being in the forest. Our water source is in the forest and I always have to go clean that area because I always find dirt and garbage there. We also faced a period of drought when we had no more water and the spring dried up, we tried to disinfect the area and do what our grandparents taught us in the old days to preserve the area (e.g., “There were times where the water source ran out.”; “Yes, there were times when it was very, very dry and then it stopped and yes, I had to go clean the area, disinfect it, I pray how was it done on times.”). This is our water source, and we try to take very good care of it, and unfortunately many tourists who pass through the area and others who travel through the forest leave a lot of trash. Another problem is related to deforestation, a lot of wood is cut and what remains from the

cutting is still left in the forests, a lot of debris, a lot of garbage, which ends up in people's yards and in the water we drink. The reason I think people do this, cut down forests, is to make money. I also feel stressed about the fire that some people make in the forest, which can lead to disasters. Just a week ago here in my area someone started a fire and I was lucky that someone was in the area and knew how to put it out. I don't understand why some people take the mess to the forest and start fires, and don't take it to a dumpster or a collection centre. Lately we also have a problem with bears that started coming into people's yards (e.g., "We had problems, really with bears, but I can't say that I saw them, but they are still coming through people's yards ."). I haven't had this problem myself, but I know from other people in the community. Before, the foresters were more careful, they went and gave them food, now I think they are hungry and can no longer find what they need in the forest, and for this reason they start looking in people's yards. In addition, probably because there is a lot of garbage left in the forest, they learn this smell and become familiar with certain products in the community, and later search for them by smell in our areas. There used to be fish in this river in the area where I live, and now there are none at all, not a single trout (e.g., "I once heard that there was a pond somewhere here, in Valea Seacă, but I don't know if it still exists with trout. They used to be."). People have made some ponds in the area to reproduce it, but in an artificial way.

I believe that we cannot survive without nature, especially when you are in a bad mood, you don't feel well. If you go to nature, you heal, you recreate and you are a different person when you return to your daily activities (e.g., "You can't survive without nature."; "She is everything, you went out, you went out in the air, if you have any bad moods or feel bad, you went out and recreated. When you came back, it's like you're a different person."). There is a conflict between the needs of humans and nature, in the sense that I see a struggle for existence. There are groups that go into nature and harvest a lot of natural resources to make money. They often leave everything empty behind them and because they don't know when to stop picking, nor do they know how to pick so as not to harm the flora. Many things are no longer as I saw them in my childhood or as they were in the time of my grandparents, and I learned them from their stories. The forest we have now is diminishing day by day and many times when I go to the forest I see desolate hills, completely deforested (e.g., "So this is what I told you in the foreground in the wood cutting, which was not there before. That's why nature has gone out of balance, and that's why the craziness we're dealing with now. It's because the forest is not what it was in my grandparents' time. You look into the void and see the other side of the city.") When I was in school, I often went with the class to the forest to clean. I notice that nowadays this custom has been lost, and the lack of education and lack of awareness of the phenomenon makes many people not understand what is happening to nature. I learned from a young age that I have to take care of the resources I have from nature and take good care of the nature around me. I understood that man is to blame for the imbalances in nature and he does a lot of harm if he is not responsible (e.g., "Okay, so let's somehow take care of the resources we have."; "Yes, because everything man does not come someone else."; "If only people were a little more responsible, but it leaves a lot to be desired."). I believe that nature should be protected because we gain our health from it. People who used to live in this area and lived past 100 years old because they didn't have so much pollution and didn't destroy the natural habitat. We were educated in this regard from a young age, and I think that today's young people should be much more educated in schools about nature. Fines and legislation in force theoretically exist on paper, but in

practice they are not enforced, and those responsible should be more careful about this, because many things also happen due to their disinterest.

Quotes

You can't survive without nature.

In nature we look at its beauties, relax and pick up all the craziness that others leave in nature.

So this is what I told you in the foreground in the wood cutting, which was not there before. That's why nature has gone out of balance, and that's why the craziness we're dealing with now. It's because the forest is not what it was in my grandparents' time. You look into the void and see the other side of the city.

Keywords

Cleaning the nature; healing; education; deforestation; awareness; protection

RL2_RO09, Romania, Nature has changed

Narrative

I am a 56-year-old woman with a low standard of living, in relatively good health, and am currently employed in the field of special education. During my childhood experiences with nature were very positive (e.g., "When I was a child it was great."), but now honestly, I'm afraid to walk in nature anymore (e.g., "When I used to walk in nature, I was safe, even in forest, let's say picking mushrooms, fruits, strawberries, blueberries like it used to be, but now I'm honestly afraid"). I used to go mushroom picking, strawberry and blueberry picking with my grandparents and parents, but nowadays I don't do such activities anymore. Now I am very afraid of the bears in the area that have gotten out of control, something we have not faced before (e.g., "You are not afraid of people, like you are afraid of animals."; "Every step, you're afraid. I'm afraid of bears and before there weren't, there weren't that many bears here."). As a child, I used to go to the forest alone, especially since I lived right at the base of the forest, in the mountains, and I went to pick berries without having any problems or negative experiences in nature. Now I believe that humans are to blame for this imbalance related to the excessive presence of bears in the area because they were brought by the authorities and left in our forests. I think it's all

about money, politics, and the carelessness of some people. In addition, another problem that I have faced and is bothering me is related to the cleanliness of the forest. When I was young, we often go to the forest and everything was beautiful, green, clean, well maintained, and now I see that it is full of plastic, bags, and garbage at every step. The reason this happens is the lack of education and the fact that people do not understand how nature works. I think we should talk more with the people around us, take more actions and educate them in this regard (e.g., “Education done this way for everyone, because not everyone understands.”; “We should talk to people closely and there should be some educational actions, for example”). Usually when I go in nature, I go to spend time on green grass, to relax and come home with positive energy, so for recreational purposes. I go with my family and only look for certain designated areas and prefer not to stray too far from the group. This fear of bears in the area, especially after I saw the bear in my vicinity, intensified compared to the behaviour I had as a child and I used to go right into the heart of the forest to pick fruit. Now I go to pick flowers for teas or some fruits if I find them in the area where I am (e.g., “So, here more, relaxing, picking mushrooms, flowers for tea or fruits if I find them.”; “No I go to unknown places, only on specially arranged routes where there are markings.”). I have seen that sometimes people leave mess in natural areas, they also make fires that are left unattended which can be very dangerous and can lead to natural disasters (e.g., “The mess and madness that is left, people who make fires that, for example, when they’re unsupervised and they can be disastrous. I know you’re not allowed to do these things these days, even if there are fines, probably some people still take the risk.”). I believe people use natural resources for many purposes, some to earn an income, others to survive. The problem of deforestation in the area it is present because some people think that the forest is only theirs, and the sanctions and fines are not applied (e.g., “I don’t know if they are really applied, they exist on paper.”; “The forest wouldn’t disappear like that, day of day.”). Some earn money from the exploitation of natural resources, but the area is affected a lot (e.g., “Only the money that some earn, but it affects the area a lot.”). As for the actions that some people do in organised groups with the purpose of picking mushrooms and berries, they produce negative effects on the environment if they go day by day and just want to make money from it. People who are in the area and go once or twice a year to pick mushrooms or berries and take only what they need for food, I don’t think it affects that negatively the nature (e.g., “But if you go once, two times per year, I don’t think you’re affecting nature that much, but how there are these groups that go day by day out and make money from it, I don’t know how good it is for natural resources.”). I try to protect the natural environment as much as I can and every time, I go to the forest I start cleaning and collecting all the mess I come across because I can’t stand and see these things. I don’t think the presence of tourist groups in our mountain areas affects nature, as long as they respect the proposed routes and do not deviate from the respective areas. If they understand that there are certain rules in nature according to which they should behave, then things would be positive for nature. Especially since the infrastructure has been developed in our area and several access roads to certain mountain areas have been paved, it is possible to drive safely, people can reach the top of the mountain much more easily and I think that is a good thing. In addition, many areas have been laid out for people and they use them in an efficient way, they no longer go to the forest to make fire, camping or barbecue (e.g., “There is more traffic since they paved, first of all they are these two sections can be used in other conditions.”; “I think it’s a good thing.”; “I saw that

they have also set up areas for barbecues or camping where people can go out into nature”). So, I think that the infrastructure in the area has been developed and it’s a good thing, especially since they don’t let them drive their cars everywhere, there are also certain barriers or regulations. In addition, the development of gas infrastructure in our area has led to the change of some behaviours that people used to do. Some used to heat with wood, and now they use gas and very little wood. There were other activities that people did in the area that provided them with a living. For example, they worked in uranium mines. Now these activities have disappeared, many mines have been closed. Some still use natural resources as an additional source of income (e.g., “I know that this is what many people do, that is, they are used to it, and they live from it. Some still do not know how to do anything else, others have found other alternatives. Some people use the resources in the environment to obtain another source of income. Even if there are other alternatives for obtaining income in the area, some still prefer this option because they are used up.”). We should talk to people more often and there should be teams that deal with their education. I’m pessimistic about the future if things continue at this rate because I don’t think future generations will have resources to enjoy. Nature should be protected by people in this field, who deal with it and are specialists in this sense (e.g., “Certain people in this field should deal with such a thing, the specialists.”). However, corruption is high, and many of us are discouraged. I believe that the solution is education, communication with people in the community, increased involvement on our part to achieve the desired results. We should all mobilise and make a change.

Quotes

Education done this way for everyone, because not everyone understands.

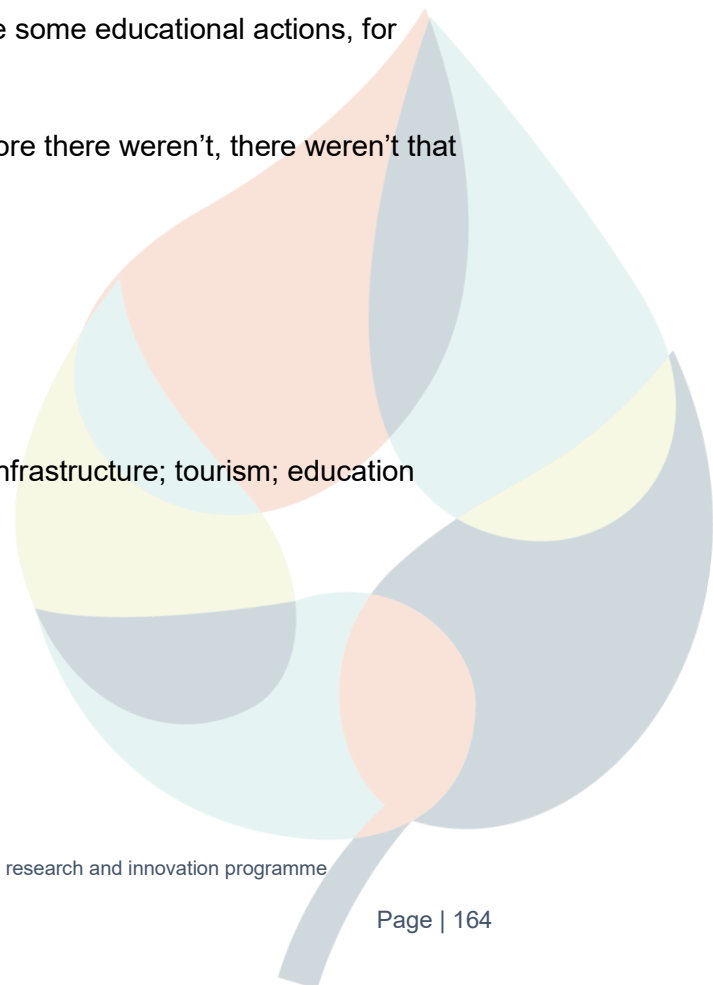
We should talk to people closely and there should be some educational actions, for example.

Every step, you’re afraid. I’m afraid of bears and before there weren’t, there weren’t that many bears here.

When I was a child it was great.

Keywords

Ecological behaviour; negative emotions; pollution; infrastructure; tourism; education



RL2_RO10, Romania, The greed of people and the destruction of nature

Narrative

I am a 60-year-old woman, a housewife, I take care of the household, I am unemployed, and I don't have such a good level of health. I was born in the middle of nature and lived in a house surrounded by mountains on all sides, with beautiful forests, as they once were. Now things have changed, and nature is no longer what it was when I was a child (e.g., "My house was surrounded by mountains on all sides, with beautiful forests. Well, they were then, now they are not."; "With the cutting of forests and what is happening today... We can no longer say that it is the same as it was once when I was a child."). Nature degraded over the years because people destroyed everything that was beautiful out of the desire to make money and greed (e.g., "Nature degraded over the years, nature degraded hard, because humans destroyed everything what was beautiful from the desire to make money. The greed for money destroyed mankind and all that was good."). The mountains are left bare, some places I don't even recognise anymore, because I know there were forests in my childhood. We had a hard childhood because we didn't have enough money and we didn't have food, but we have a cow and we fed ourselves with some potatoes that we grew in the garden (e.g., "And we never had enough of a penny, often with food too we were poor, but we raised a cow and fed ourselves as best we could with a couple of potatoes that we put in the garden."). I worked very hard, took care of the animals and went to the spring for water, I often preferred not to go to school when I had harder hours to take care of the household and do the housework (e.g., "We had our schedule to go in the stable, to carry water to the animals from the spring where we get water to drink, which was 200 m away. We had to carry some cans, but it was so beautiful."). Every summer and autumn we went to the forest to pick strawberries, blueberries and cranberries or other fruits of the forest (e.g., "If you want me to tell you that there wasn't a day in the summer when we didn't go to the forest to pick strawberries, blueberries, cranberries, although we were small."). I remember going to the forest with an aunt who was older and protected us, but at the same time taught us where to find these good things of nature. We walked for miles through the forest and felt safe. I earned a little money sometimes from picking medicinal plants (e.g., "If you've heard of arnica, the medicinal plant from which medicines are made, it was very little per kilogram, so it was paid, but I went to the hills where arnica bloomed and picked for a few pennies."; "And we would fill a bag and take it to the collection and receive enough money to buy two loaves of bread and the hard-earned money, as it was then, brought us such a new satisfaction that it was our penny."). When it was mushroom season, we went picking with other children in the forest and we were so happy when we found a few mushrooms, we quickly came home to clean them and my mother prepared the food we brought from what we picked (e.g., "...when it was sponge season we went and picked sponges, but also with other children."; "It was so nice when I found a mushroom."; "If I came with a full bag, I cleaned them quickly and my mother made food from the produce I brought"). We were troubled and poor, but we lived a beautiful life in the middle of nature. Now children are

preoccupied with technology and phones, they spend very little time in nature. In addition, I consider that you don't really have anywhere to go in the forests anymore because there are no more trees, the mushrooms don't grow like they used to, they don't have a favourable environment for development anymore (e.g., "You don't even have anywhere to go in the forests anymore, because there are no more, there are no more trees, there are no more."); "Mushrooms don't even grow anymore, you have to go very far to look for them in certain wooded areas where they have found a favourable environment"). The main reason why people don't appreciate and protect nature is because of the greed for money and the desire of some to earn as much as possible without caring what they leave behind for the younger generations. People are focused on their own needs and only want to be good for themselves, without being concerned about the fact that they are destroying nature, and our descendants no longer enjoy all that it offers us as it was left by God (e.g., "Well, people have changed, they have changed, people weren't so greedy for money before."); "They are no longer interested in what is left behind, if they leave something for their descendants, it matters that they are well, to be able to build houses or what they have planned, but they don't care that nature is being destroyed by their behaviour."; "Future generations and children will be deprived of the joys of nature, which God left us, loaded with everything."). I believe that we are witnessing a total degradation of nature and everything around us because people do not think about the future, about tomorrow, but fortunately there are still some places where nature has been protected (e.g., "We witness to a total degradation of nature and everything we see around us, because people don't think about what will happen in a few years, they only think about today, or about their own good, but they no longer consider the good of their descendants, so that protect this beautiful nature"). I walk a lot and try to avoid driving. Whenever I have the opportunity, I go to nature to relax, take a breath of fresh air, look at the forest and find peace. I believe that nature regenerates me spiritually through everything it offers us. We can't survive without nature, especially since I live off everything, she gives us. I buy almost nothing from stores, and all the food we have is from nature and from our household where I have a greenhouse, grow potatoes, and have a few animals. I have a great love for nature and animals, and I am sad that I have not been able to pass this on to my children, as they have other concerns. We have certain customs that are practiced from our ancestors, such as shepherding or herding in the mountains, and I think that is very good, and I appreciate people who still do such activities (e.g., "Well, this thing has been going on for thousands of years days ago, in which this custom of having pens with animals, with cattle, with sheep is practiced, I learned this from my ancestors."; "If this obstinacy continues, what I saw also happens at us, it's very good, I really appreciate it."). In addition, it is a great advantage for the community because it has access to healthy food, and the work of the farmer must be appreciated because it provides ecological products (e.g., "You buy a healthy cheese, a healthy milk, so everything is healthy, and the work of the farmer must be appreciated."). I see nowadays many people who destroy nature, and this affects me strongly and hurts me (e.g., "There are a lot of people who have destroyed nature, it hurts me, it hurts me to see and even know bad people who have no soul and destroy."). There is illegal logging in the area by irresponsible people out of their desire for economic gain (e.g., "A disaster remains after the logging, and they should leave something beautiful behind them, but their desire to earn, to have money it is greater than the desire to leave nature for posterity to enjoy."). Another harmful practice for our environment is related to the way people pick berries, that is, they use certain tools

in their collection that affect the bushes and destroy the plants entirely (e.g., “It’s worse when they go to pick blueberries or cranberries and they use the “hreibān”, a tool with which they pick the fruits and pluck the cranberries with all their roots, some they also pick them white or raw, just to fill the baskets and make money”). Some people do this for a living, and picking mushrooms and berries is more common in the area than in years past.

I believe that nature should be protected first from illegal deforestation. The export of wood from our area has become more and more visible and I see daily whole wagons of wood leaving our area (e.g., “These are illegal forest cuttings.”; “I don’t know if you saw when you come home as they carry with wooden trains and logs with full wagons, 30, 40 wagons a day.”). I suffer immensely, I can’t bear to see this anymore, they have no mercy at all, and I see nobody does anything to stop them (e.g., “My heart is breaking, I couldn’t bear to see it anymore.”; This wood is going abroad, so they have no mercy at all, no one does anything to stop them”). When I was young, the river in our area was full of fish, we used to go and catch them with our hands, and now there are no fish in this river. People have polluted the waters and they affected the diversity of fish in the rivers because they have gone to extract stone and sand from these rivers with various machines (e.g., “Machines like this that take out gravel, sand and ballast, but destroy everything for construction, destroy everything.”).

Quotes

It was so nice when I found a mushroom.

If I came with a full bag, I cleaned them quickly and my mother made food from the produce I brought.

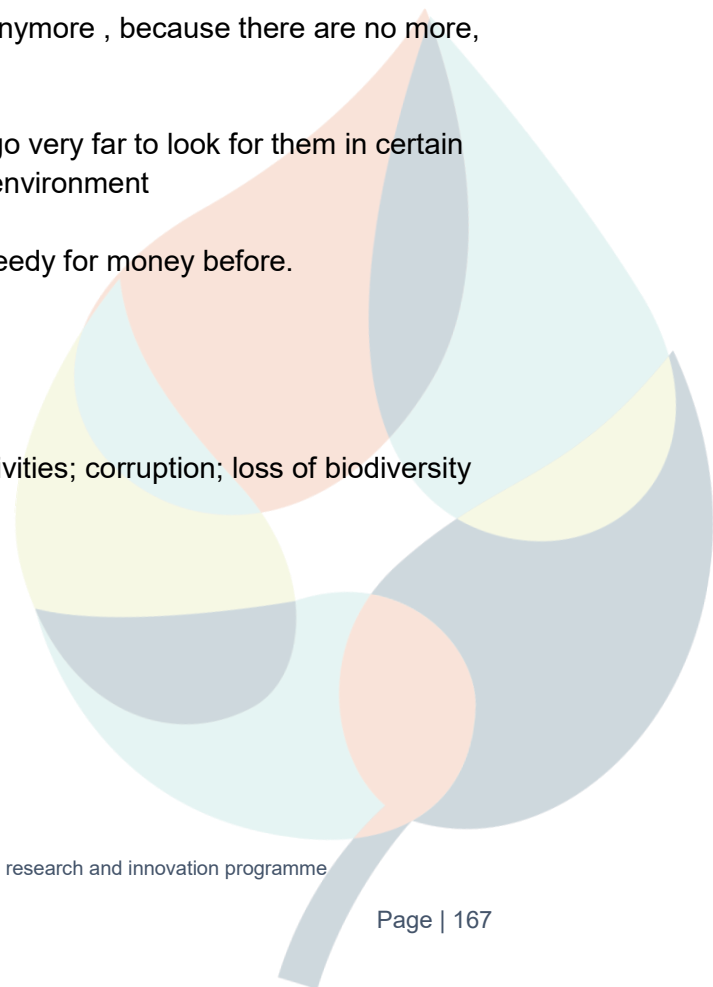
You don’t even have anywhere to go in the forests anymore , because there are no more, there are no more trees, there are no more.

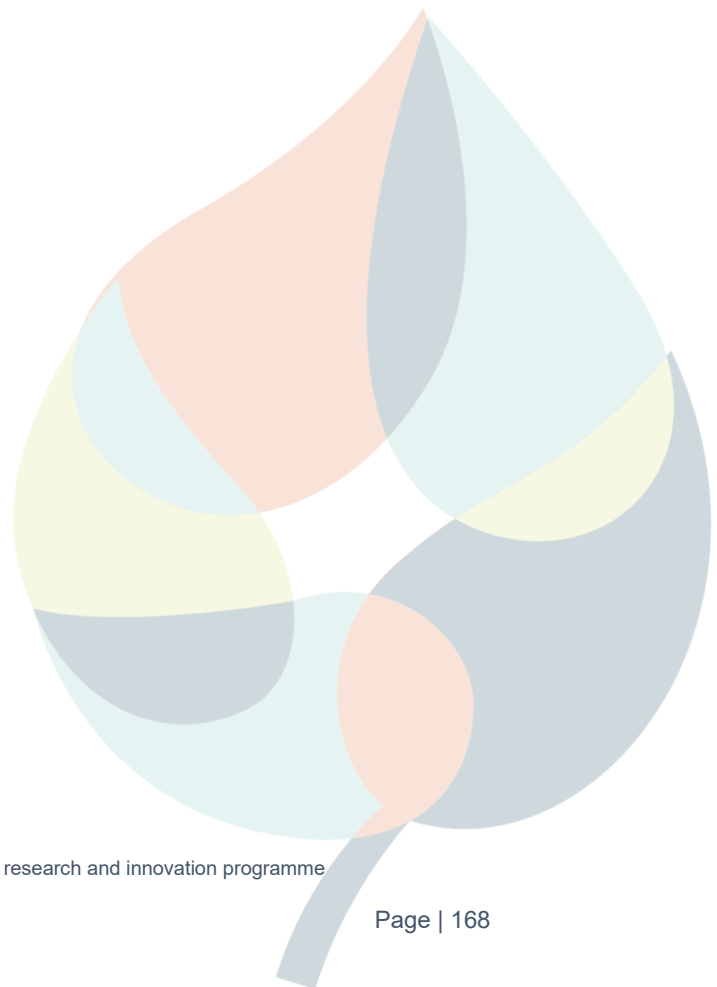
Mushrooms don’t even grow anymore, you have to go very far to look for them in certain wooded areas where they have found a favourable environment

Well, people have changed people weren’t so greedy for money before.

Keywords

Greed; protection of nature; deforestation; illegal activities; corruption; loss of biodiversity





Research Line 3: Energy communities, energy poverty and community energy schemes

RL3_DK01, Denmark, Sarah, the disillusioned early adapter and enthusiast

Narrative

I have always been interested in the climate and tried to make aware and responsible choices and decisions. In my previous house, I switched from oil to a pellets-burner, because this was considered both economical and environmentally friendly. Then, the fees started to come, and it turned out not being so beneficial after all. When I moved here, I invested in solar collectors using the existing support scheme, but then they changed the regulations with the maximum effect of solar, so this did not end up too well either. Also, we are all saving money to our pensions, but these were paid out from the state now in advance. Like many others, I used this payment to invest in the solar collectors. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to pay for it. I've also invested in an air-to-air heating-pump, but now when electricity is so costly it's become way too expensive to use it. We invested in wind turbines on Samsø, but now the politicians have decided that the locally produced wind-energy is going out on the international market. It's good to do things for the climate, but now we have lost faith in the system, and we are disappointed. I wouldn't buy an electric car now as I don't trust that this will be a good choice in the future. And, is it really a good choice for the environment? I don't know? You can't trust the politicians to keep their word, and who will be able to pay for these changes anyway? In general, I feel cheated and disappointed, and I discuss this a lot with my friends. However, I am not involved in the public debate as I'm not even sure where to turn or what to say. There is probably nobody listening anyway.

Quotes



It's good to do things for the climate, but now we have lost faith in the system, and we are disappointed. You can't trust the politicians to keep their word, and who will be able to pay for these changes anyway? In general, I feel cheated and disappointed, and I discuss this a lot with my friends. I am not involved in the public debate as I'm not even sure where to turn or what to say. There is probably nobody listening anyway.

Keywords

Disappointed, early-adopter, politicians failing people, mistrust, powerlessness

RL3_DK02, Denmark, Paul, the recycling handyman

Narrative

I am Paul, a 37-year-old father with sole custody of my son. When I bought this house 4,5 years ago it was more-or-less an empty shell. It didn't have any insulation, or heating-system, and it wasn't connected to the electricity grid, or water system, or even a drain... My old employer had bought this place, and then he ran into some problems. The house was not finished, and when me and my wife got divorced, I thought about this house. I wanted a project, something to put my hands on, so I bought it. I work at the local recycling station, and I love to build things and using recycled, old materials. I tend to salvage a lot of things and bring them home, but now I have kind of made a deal with myself only to bring home things that I am actually going to use for the house. I really wanted an air-to water heat pump, so I decided to save on other stuff in to be able to afford one. However, this year I have hardly used it at all due to the extreme prices on electricity. Well, it's a relatively big house, 168 m², but it still gets warm when you spend time in it. It's really fun to build stuff, like the veranda, and the staircase. I love to work with wood. Basically all the furniture is recycled, including the kitchen cabinets. Well, I would probably have bought some of the furniture new if I could have, but I've prioritised the technical solutions like the heat pump. I wouldn't have bought new building materials though, never. I really enjoy working with old materials. The floor is stone, and that's really practical with our three dogs, but it does get kind of cold to walk on it... This recycling old materials and building and stuff has become sort of a lifestyle, and I am actually building a sailing boat from two identical old boats, putting them together into one perfect specimen. Here on Samsø, there is not really a market for old things and old materials, but I still have this "secret" dream to start my own recycling business here some day, specializing in old building materials and furniture. Also, I'm a bit of a "prepper", or "prepper light", and make sure to have supplies in my boat in case of emergencies. I really wish we would be better

at taking care of old things and old materials rather than just making new ones in an endless loop of consumption. Well, I'm not politically active, but people have actually asked me if I would like to go for mayor. That might be a way to change the market and salvage some old materials and houses from becoming waste.

Quotes

Here on Samsø, there is not really a market for old things and old materials, but I still have this “secret” dream to start my own recycling business here some day, specialising in old building materials and furniture. I'm a bit of a “prepper”, or “prepper light”, and make sure to have supplies in my boat in case of emergencies. I really wish we would be better at taking care of old things and old materials rather than just making new ones in an endless loop of consumption. I'm not politically active, but people have actually asked me if I would like to go for mayor. That might be a way to change the market and salvage some old materials and houses from becoming waste.

Keywords

Lack of funds; passion for using reclaimed materials; life project

RL3_DK03, Denmark, Henry, the retired driver who loves his car

Narrative

I'm Henry, I'm 81 years old and a retired lorry driver. I am divorced and rent this apartment from my landlord, who lives upstairs. I am not really engaged in the heating solution of the house, but I know we have direct heating with electricity, and I also have a fireplace that I use a lot. I am interested in the transition to a low-carbon society, but I could never live without my beautiful veteran car. I love it so much, and I love to drive. I even drive professionally now and then for a neighbour who is an undertaker. Then, I get to take people on their very last ride, and I talk to them. That feels important somehow. I've lived in this house for a long time, but lately costs have increased, especially the electricity has become very expensive. They say it's the war in Ukraine that is to blame for this, but I am sceptical to whether it's really the prices of electricity that are increasing. I believe that we are being scammed. Electricity doesn't really cost much, its mostly transition fees anyway. Also, I think that this whole electric car thing is a mistake, because

now they need a lot of electricity to drive them. At the same time, it seems that we on Samsø have gone crazy as we have started to export our locally produced (wind) electricity to the Baltics.

Clearly, money rules the world and I that is really annoying. Also, wonder what the second-hand value will be on these electric cars once they get outdated. My beautiful old car just keeps increasing in value.

Quotes

They say it's the war in Ukraine that is to blame for this, but I am sceptical to whether it's really the prices of electricity that are increasing. I believe that we are being scammed. Electricity doesn't really cost much, its mostly transition fees anyway.

Keywords

Lack of trust, scepticism, car is part of identity

RL3_DK04, Denmark, Jack (and Jeanette), the architectural heritage and sustainability couple

Narrative

Interview with Jack and Jeanette.

Jack's perspective:

We are a married couple, Jeanette and I (age 71, and 74) and we bought this protected, old house around 10 years ago. We have upgraded it carefully to become a sustainable and energy-efficient house, while making sure to also restore it to its former architectural glory. We still have the old oil burner in the basement, but we rarely use it. A full tank has lasted us for over two years now. We use less than 600 litres per year. Already when we moved in, the windows were old and needed changing. We decided to invest in new both because of environmental concerns and economical. Also, the aesthetics are really

important to us, so we invested in new ones that were exact copies of the original. At the same time we also put window film on the window glass so that they heat the house when the sun is shining. It really gets super-hot sometimes, but then we just open the windows for a while. The windows were very costly (100 000 NOK/10000Euro), but we wanted to prioritise the aesthetic and architectural value of the house. “We are really into sustainability, Jeanette and me, and we do not like to leave things half-done. We used to be able to see one of Samsøs very first wind turbines from our window here, and we really appreciated the view. Jeanette is the technical one and the driving force, and she is also the aesthetical one. She made this picture of it (Jack proudly points at a beautiful piece of art that is hanging over the desk that hides the heat-pump).

Quotes

We have upgraded it carefully to become a sustainable and energy-efficient house, while making sure to also restore it to its former architectural glory. The (solar) windows were very costly, but we wanted to prioritise the aesthetic and architectural value of the house.

Keywords

Preserving architecture, preserving shoreline, aesthetical, sustainable, preparedness

RL3_DK05, Denmark, Jeanette (and Jack), the architectural heritage and sustainability couple

Narrative

Interview with Jack and Jeanette.

Jeanette's perspective:

We are Jeanette and Jack (aged 71, and 74) and about 10 years ago we bought this protected, old house. We have upgraded it carefully to become a sustainable and energy-efficient house, while making sure to also restore it to its former architectural glory. We still have the old oil burner in the basement, because we want to be ready for everything, and you never know. However, but we rarely use it. A full tank has lasted us for over two years now, and we use less than 600 litres per year. Already when we moved in, the windows

were old and needed changing. We decided to invest in new both because of environmental concerns and economical. Also, the aesthetics are really important to us, so we invested in new ones that were exact copies of the original. At the same time we also put window film on the window glass so that they heat the house when the sun is shining. It really gets super-hot sometimes, but then we just open the windows for a while. The windows were very costly (100 000 NOK/10000Euro), but we wanted to prioritise the aesthetic and architectural value of the house.

“We have a fireplace, but that’s mostly because its cosy to sit by the fire. In addition, we have installed two air-to-air heat-pumps that we have managed to place so that they don’t disturb the architecture at all. Look at this one here, for example, we have hidden it under the desk. Let me show you!”

Jeanette proudly pulls out the antique desk that cleverly hides the heat pump.

When you live this close to the ocean, it is so obvious that climate change already is upon us. We are continually rebuilding the banks to preserve the shoreline here together with our neighbours. We are getting a bit older now, so the younger generation will have to do the heavy lifting, but we are still putting in the hours. Up to two times a week we are working on it. It’s a good way to stay fit. That, and working on the house...

Quotes

When you live this close to the ocean, it is so obvious that climate change already is upon us. We are continually rebuilding the banks to preserve the shoreline here together with our neighbours.

Keywords

Preserving architecture, preserving shoreline, aesthetical, sustainable

RL3_DK06, Denmark, Lorentz, the energy professional who moved home to the island

Narrative

My name is Lorenz, I’m 52 years old and I work at the energy academy. I’ve been a driver for the local environment and energy solutions. It was a bit special that I came back to Samsø. I had moved out and wasn’t coming back, but then it so happened that I took over our farm, a bit reluctantly. I tested being a farmer for a while, but then I got more and more involved in ecological farming in general, the building of a new recycling centre, and ... I

guess I needed something to do, something to engage with. There was a high school here, with a lot of kids, and that got me thinking. So, we sold the farm, and I became a teacher in ecology at x University for nine years.

There were 70-80 kids who lived at the school, and I learned a lot about pedagogics. However, I was away a lot from my family, and when the crazy idea about the energy island was initiated by a minister, we decided to go for it! People said, that will never happen, but I got totally engaged and I saw the potential. I built my involvement on the environmentalism that I had carried with me from the 1970s, and started to dwell on how the environmental engagement of my generation could be used into the x Project.

Some people perceived the whole project as a threat and initially, there was a lot of resistance. However, we managed to use the freedom and justice angle to our advantage. The narrative was that nature, and the local environment does not belong to private landowners, but to the whole society, the community. The Danish tradition of co-ownership was something to build on, and in the 1980s I and many others bought a share in one of the first wind turbines on the island. We managed to contribute to a change in people's minds, going from a top-down approach to decentralization. It is an incredibly good feeling that we all own everything together. Now, the x is very much an institution and sometimes I wish we could start again from scratch. The academy has changed over time, and the generation who were active from the 1980s and the beginning of the 2000s, was clear on what's in it for me, for us. But now it is up to the new generation that are taking over, what do they want it to be? We no longer have the same process activated role, but I'm thinking that we could transform into sort of a nursery, or incubator, for new projects and businesses on the island. Now we work a lot now with circular economy, ecological farming, waste handling and recycling, usually in the role as consultants for different organisations. We are currently exporting the Energy Island Concept to a Japanese island, and I get to tell our story to them. In general, Samsø is transforming from a farm-based economy to one based on tourism, and there is a lot of interest in locally produced products.

During the later years, people's awareness on the island has shifted from energy to climate changes, and a big part of this is due to that we can now actually see the changes with rising sea levels, more intense rains, storms, and this is starting to have consequences for local farmers. It is obvious that we need legislation and policies that will enable us to change our level of consumption.

Quotes

We no longer have the same process activated role, but I'm thinking that we could transform into sort of a nursery, or incubator, for new projects and businesses on the island. Now we work a lot now with circular economy, ecological farming, waste handling and recycling, usually in the role as consultants for different organisations.

Keywords

Transformation, local business, incubator, new narrative, restarting

RL3_DK07, Denmark, Martine, using art to communicate energy and climate

Narrative

My name is Martine and I work with communication in relation to Samsø as an Energy Island. We started with capacity development in the 1980s and at that time it was not possible to talk about climate change. However, we did live a life closely connected to nature here on Samsø and I had been thinking a lot about how to communicate concepts such as CO₂ and biogas's et cetera to the general public. Back then people did not really know about these things. Now people are aware of climate change and on Samsø we have managed to build up an understanding by using innovative means of communication, such as art and narratives... Nature is not always pleasant, and climate change is definitely a feel-good concept. At the same time, we humans are basically like apes, but then we suddenly started to walk upright on two legs. When we are to reach higher levels of understandings, we need to push ourselves and really make an effort. I mean, how do you really talk about the future? It's not an easy concept for us humans. Gradually, we have become less of an institution for innovation and more of an eye-opening community. We have a very real problem with overconsumption, and the planet simply cannot take it anymore.

And we basically do not have a language when it comes to discussing these difficult topics, and many simply say no and refuse to accept the problem. With my work I'm trying to reach everyone, including those who are marginalised in society. We need to give people a language to talk about climate and climate change together. It is mega-difficult. That is why I am occupied with using art as a means to communicate, because not everyone will relate to abstract models, statistics and numbers. I use poetry too, and it helps in raising questions such as; who has credibility, who can we trust, how can we talk about energy as something fruitful, as something that we can all have in common?

Quotes

We have a very real problem with overconsumption, and the planet simply cannot take it anymore.

And we basically do not have a language when it comes to discussing these difficult topics, and many simply say no and refuse to accept the problem. With my work I'm trying to reach everyone, including those who are marginalised in society. We need to give people a language to talk about climate and climate change together.

Keywords

Art and communication, language of nature, nature is not always pleasant, future is scary

RL3_DK08, Denmark, Bogdan, the Bosnian refugee who turned school teacher and chooses not to have kids

Narrative

My name is Bogdan, and I came from x to Denmark as a refugee together with my parents when I was 10 years old. I believe I have both the immigrant and the native view of the world. I came to Samsø 3 years ago and started working as a teacher. I still rent a small room in a big house, but I am thinking of buying something in the future. I want an apartment rather than a house, and that's hard to find here on Samsø. There are mostly single-dwellings. Also, I feel it is really complicated with the insecurity of the future and the ongoing war in Europe now (Ukraine). The electricity prices have gone up, but it has still not reflected much on my everyday life. I'm not too worried about paying my bills as I do not have responsibility for anybody other than myself. I have decided that I will not have any children of my own because in order to help keeping the planet green. This is my sacrifice. I like working with kids, and I teach them about pollution and how things are connected. The big problem in the world is that we are too many people, and we do not have enough food. For me, this is a very global world, and everything is connected.

I really support vegetarians and vegans, but I cannot stop eating meat. I see all the floods, tornadoes and climate chaos and I know it is all part of global warming, and I know I probably should become a vegetarian, but I don't even manage one meat-free day a week... When I heard about the war in Ukraine, I couldn't sleep for the first two weeks. It brought up memories, and I remember my father saying to us that it was an earthquake and that we had to run. He did not say it was a war, but I think I knew anyway. I may seem like a very pessimistic person, but my pessimism is founded in realism. Most of my colleagues have kids, and they will ask me why I don't have kids, and I say that it is easier to run from war if you don't have to carry a child in your arms like my parents did. I try to help the kids we have from Ukraine here now, I have been thinking about going and fight for Ukraine, but I am not a fighter. For me everything is connected, energy and the war: The war means we are not being able to focus on the climate, so the war is a big threat to the planet now. All wars, actually. My father kind of knew there would be a war, and he did not prepare, but he talked about it. My mother listened to him, and she started to prepare. What saved us was his predictions and her preparedness. I probably should be more like my mom, but I'm more like him, and I'm not preparing. Its not my style, and I do not even

know what to do. Maybe I could buy a gas-mask. The kids at school will watch the children's news about the Ukrainian war and get worried, but all the other teachers say to the kids that war is not coming to Denmark. But I don't know, that's what everyone thought in my country too before the war... People may say I'm being selfish for not wanting to have kids of my own, but I believe the world is over-populated, and I want to do my part in saving planet Earth. I'm not involved in environmental work, but I try to live environmentally friendly myself, except for the meat thing. I will listen and support the ideas, but I do not myself get into debates. It is obvious to me that people have been lied to and politicians have been ridiculing science with regards to the climate. I just want to contribute the best way that I can.

Quotes

I have decided that I will not have any children of my own because in order to help keeping the planet green. This is my sacrifice. The big problem in the world is that we are too many people, and we do not have enough food. For me, this is a very global world, and everything is connected.

Keywords

Global world, war and sustainability, no children, over-population, helping people, saving the planet

RL3_DK09, Denmark, Iliana, a young engineer who knits for climate and will not have children

Narrative

My name is Iliana and I rent a small apartment here on Samsø. I came here to be an intern at a local company working with energy solutions. I'm an engineer, and I think the solutions here are very impressive in all their simplicity. It is simple, but it still works, and the successful reuse of materials for the local solutions are also impressive. For example, it is possible to see how the district heating machines function. I really like that. The first thing you notice when arriving to Samsø with the ferry is that there is a microgrid in the harbour. It is inspiring to see how such a small island has done so much. In my country, it's a narrative that solar doesn't really work, which is crazy. We have much more sun and

more sun hours than Denmark, and it's working fine in Denmark. I'm interested in finding out how to support general knowledge on energy solutions, and especially renewables. I want to work with new ways to inform and discuss with people. The co-operation solution here on Samsø shows that Co-ops, and people are more involved. I learned how we can approach people in a different way: Not like: I'm an engineer, this is the best location for this, but to actually to talk to people, understand their view. In my country, they are beginning with solar now, and wind. I know an older woman who is living next to a mountain where they had put a wind turbine said: So, they don't have money for the education but they put up a large fan on the hill.

So, people are not informed and, of course, they cannot know this. There are no traditional windmills in my country, so it is not so easy to compare. They never saw anything like this. So when they see its moving when its windy, of course they think it produces wind.

On Samsø, its different. Everyone knows how it works because they own parts of it. Here, when they build a new solar power part, people are for, because they know how much they earn from it. But the new people who moved to Samsø, they don't want it in their view. I like wind turbines, because I know it is something good. Also, I don't think it is negative for the view. This is a small island, and everything is smaller scale. People ask if I am not bored here, living on this small island, but I have my wool and I knit and I run, and that's enough for me... Happy to rent for now, but I am dreaming of having a house, with a back yard. There, I will have local energy production. I want to travel the world, but then I want to settle down.

I always get in arguments with my dad. This year it got 40 degrees in my country, and then we were talking, and I said its global warming and he said: Well, it was 40 degrees when I was young too. But I say, yes, but that was one day. Now its many days that it's so hot you cannot breathe. It's so crazy, right now I am knitting a temperature blanket. You know one row every day, and the colour depends on the temperature that day. A friend of mine said, it would be fun to make another one in 10 years, and compare. So I've decided to make another one 10 years from now. Every month I take a pic of the new row and post it on Instagram.

I'm taking the data from the closest location of my home-town. This year's blanket is so boring, because everything is red. I usually put some story about climate change, and post it with the blanket progress. I think it's easier for people when they can see it like this. People, when they see this, it's in their face. It's based on official meteorological data. Temperature blankets are a thing, but not like I do, to continually compare, and connect it to climate change. Maybe I should embroider the year and place. This is art. And I am very interested in research communication, and I think this could be a way to do it. I want to make it really easy for people with no education to understand. I do not want to have children, and I would not like to have children. There is too much of us already on the planet. We humans have taken over and destroyed everything. We should not push away other species. We should be fewer, not more. Of course, you cannot tell people what to do, not to have children.

But I saw this movie with David Attenborough, who talks about that if people are more educated, they will have fewer children. That really stuck with me. If I would like to have children, I will probably want to adopt. Take care of an already existing child. When the war started in Ukraine, I was so afraid. All this tension in the x as well. I could not sleep for two weeks, and I kept checking the news. I had to stop reading the news,

because I was so afraid, but now I read it again. Our war was recent, it stopped the year before I was born. And there is still a lot of tensions. I feel a bit safer here in Denmark with regards to not worrying about having energy, because here it's a lot of renewables. Blackouts are not so bad, I believe. I'm okay with it, but for companies it can become a big problem, and influence the economy. I think that in Denmark they waste a lot of energy even though people are aware. People spend a lot. In my country, we save, but to save money. I think we have gotten so comfortable with what we have. I will travel by train instead of a plane. If we had less money, we would not consume so much. I believe that unfortunately, being conscious does not help for 95% of the people. We need to cut down on consumption. Just look at my blanket, I actually have a problem that I'll need to add an even warmer colour, because the warmest yarn represents up to 30 degrees, but there were a lot of days above that. I'll have to find an even darker and warmer red, maybe some kind of purple...

Quotes

Temperature blankets are a thing, but not like I do, to continually compare, and connect it to climate change. I want to make it really easy for people with no education to understand. I do not want to have children, and I would not like to have children. There is too much of us already on the planet. We humans have taken over and destroyed everything. We should not push away other species. We should be fewer, not more.

Keywords

Temperature blankets, no own children, overpopulation, research communication for the uneducated.

RL3_DK10, Denmark, Monique, graphical designer who went low-tech small scale farmer

Narrative

My name is Monique and I am a graphical designer. I grew up in the countryside, and I was very into horses and riding. Then I moved to x, and I lived there for 10 years. I was a real city-person. But I had a real interest for food and raw materials, and four years ago I bought this 100-year-old farm with some land. Now that I visit there once a month for

work, I do not understand what I was thinking. People walk around with paper cups, and that's really not smart. I did it too when I lived there, without even reflecting upon it, but now I could simply not do it. Now I live closer to nature. I have four pigs, an old species that does not grow as fast and therefore is not used in commercial farming. We call them family pigs. I also have hens and geese. Out here on the countryside, we trade with each other, someone may have meat, some have milk and some have honey. It feels really sustainable. In the summers, we hold dinners as a way to give people an experience and to become more aware. We feed the pigs and we will slaughter the pigs and eat them. It is not difficult. I call it honest. My son, who is 6, has seen pigs being slaughtered, and for him it is strange that people don't know who slaughtered the animal when he will ask them at the dinner table. The ruthless large-scale farming, that is what's cruel. Here, we are part of nature. Since we moved here, I have not bought anything new. All the furniture is old. We can see that people around us grow potatoes, and they sort them locally. It's the same with the green cabbage. Now I have much more awareness with regards to crops. The price on electricity increased, but I mostly use the wood stove for heating for environmental reasons. I also have an air-to air heat pump, but it's not currently in use. I'm dreaming of having my own wind turbine, and I'm considering solar tiles for the roof as well. I'm also dreaming of having a cow, because we buy lots of milk and cheese, and perhaps a goat too. No sheep, as they need too much land. I am really into this low-tech life, going back to nature. I am interested in politics, as we need to get back to lower consumption levels. Micro-farming should be made possible. Currently, it's not possible to go into small-scale farming and manage to make a living from it, because all the rules and regulations are made for large scale farming. Large scale pig farming should be prohibited, it's not sustainable and the meat will contain a lot of medications. This needs to be changed politically. I think it should be stopped. Pigs are so intelligent and social animals, and we should respect them. Meat should not be so cheap. We need to value what nature gives to us.

Quotes

We need to get back to lower consumption levels. Micro-farming should be made possible. We need to value what nature gives to us.

Keywords

Off-grid, back to nature, family pigs, respecting nature, small scale farming

RL3_NO01, Norway, Sara, a young woman, works in one of the public sectors of



Trondheim. Wooden-fireplace helps her to keep her home warm. Community projects are the favourite of local people.

Narrative

I am a 33-year-old woman. I have been here since 10 years ago. I work in one of the public sectors of Trondheim. My research field is sustainability. Also, I take part in art classes. I live with my boyfriend. We live in an apartment. Our washing machine and freezer are shared with other neighbours. I have no problems with energy bills, but some of my neighbours have. Most of the buildings here are old and therefore they get too cold during winter and cold seasons. I have to use a wooden oven to keep my apartment warm. I used to use less energy. Here, in my neighbourhood, there are multiple community groups such as community gardens, media groups, and sauna groups. I think a community group would be related to this project. We plant vegetables including potatoes in our backyards, and people especially children would come to get them for free. we call it "slomhagen". So we have a social gathering and therefore I think my neighbours would be interested in participating in community energy projects. I know that there is some governmental financial support in the energy sector but unfortunately they are suitable for homeowners, not for people who rent a home. For instance, my grandmother has her own home, so there is a company which is called ENOVA. She constructed solar panels, heat from the ground, and bought her electric cars. and then She requested this company and they cover some costs for her. but as I said, it is not proper for this region, because most of the buildings here are for the municipality and it is hard to buy ones. Moreover, there are x houses here that are constructed with reused materials items. these houses are for x families. So, they could request funds because they built their home.

I believe that if you could build trust and clarity about your coming project, you can get positive feedback from people and they would like to cooperate with you. Here in my neighbourhood, people are interested in community projects and we always work with each other. So, I am sure that we could have community energy schemes here.

Quotes

People are interested in community projects- people have the social integration-the government does not support vulnerable groups

Keywords

Community garden, collaboration, old houses, shared equipment, dialogue, changing behaviour

RL3_NO02, Norway, Leo, an Asian divorced man, lives in a small studio-apartment. Energy prices have been a significant issue for him since 2021.

Narrative

I am a psychology researcher at the university. I'm not Norwegian. I come from an ethnic group originating from and culturally affiliated with the general region of Central and East Asia. I have been living in Trondheim for more than 10 years. Divorced and has a 10-year-old daughter currently living with her mother. While I'm no expert on energy poverty, when I hear about this idea, the first image that comes to mind is that of people who can't pay their electricity or heat bills, who struggle to reach the end of the month, who cannot fill up their car with fuel. We are talking about aspects of poverty that I hardly imagine different from the economic one. Of course, poverty can also have a social component, but I think this is secondary, or rather it always depends on the economic and class conditions that a person/group/family has. Low-income social classes tend to feel more the consequences of the increase in energy prices and react with a major force. My experience with aspects of energy vulnerability? I've never needed to keep an eye on energy consumption here in Norway until 2021. I don't remember ever checking my energy bills. This type of behaviour for me has changed over the past few years. The price of energy in Norway was very low and therefore the general increase in prices (not just energy prices) created an adaptive behavioural change in many people. I have a small car that I don't usually use much. I live in a studio flat of 40 square meters and so let's say that energy crises affect me up to a certain point. For example, I don't know, for example, if the local authorities provide aid to families to support them with energy costs. Differently, my ex-wife, for example, who has a bigger house and who has to move more for our daughter, I know that she has been affected much more by the increase in prices, with effects on their lifestyle. They live in an apartment, on the first floor of a rather dated, old building. The poor insulation and the high energy prices force them to suffer a little from the cold of the Norwegian winter. We probably cannot speak of energy poverty, but certainly of a situation of vulnerability.

Many people today find themselves in my ex-wife's situation. Many people who in the past, by struggling and managing their small earnings, stayed above the threshold of vulnerability, living with dignity despite not having a luxurious life, today are in difficulty, and at risk of poverty.

If this should lead to forms of protest or bottom-up initiatives? It depends. People's awareness, especially in a democracy, tends to be dynamic. Everyone has their own opinions and ideas and therefore it is also difficult to have a common view on the issue of energy saving or what should be done to mitigate the problems.

Quotes

My experience with aspects of energy vulnerability? I've never needed to keep an eye on energy consumption here in Norway until 2021. I don't remember ever checking my energy bills. This type of behaviour for me has changed over the past few years.

Keywords

Energy poverty, energy costs, behavioural changes, democracy

RL3_NO03, Norway, Martin, a young self-employed man, lives alone at Trondheim. He believed old uninsulated houses are the main issues in this area.

Narrative

I am a 35-year-old man. I am self employed. I live with my cat. I never think about energy services. When I feel cold, I use my firewood. I have my refrigerator and I have no problems with electricity bills. I have seen no differences in energy circumstances during these years but I heard that in the media they highlight the fact that some people are tackling energy bills and consumption. so I try to be a little bit more careful with how I use electricity in my home. But it is still not something I am very conscious about. None of my friends and family have any problems with energy bills. I live in an area with a lot of old houses, old wooden houses, So, many of them are poorly isolated. I am assuming many people need a lot of electricity for heating. There are lots of people around here that have low incomes and are already struggling with the prices going up on everything else. I can imagine that higher electricity bills will impact people. we have a food service here which helps all the people from all income groups to share their food and help each other. We have a stronger sense of Community here. we must accept the fact that the houses are old and in poorer shape. And I share bathrooms with another family that lived upstairs. Also, people have a different attitudes to community projects. people have various incomes, educations, and occupations, and Some are involved more than others. we also have a car that we can share and use in this area.

Quotes

They care about their community- they help each other in community projects-

Keywords

Community garden, collaboration, sharing, gardening group, solar panels

RL3_NO04, Norway, Maria, a Swedish family woman, lives in a self-built house. Heat pumps help her to keep her home warm.

Narrative

I come from Switzerland. I am an architect. I am both a Ph.D. student and work for industry (some sort of Ph.D. industry-based Ph.D. position). I live in a self-built house with three other families. We made this house ourselves in Trondheim. I am a family person. I have a husband and two kids. we share our washing machine with other families. Then we have a shared air-to-an-air heat pump that heats the water tank that runs the like a water-based heating system. well, in the winter, the energy prices will go up more than double or even triple. I do not know why, because we have heat pumps. but it happens. we had stable energy bills, but during the pandemic and at present, as a result of the war between Russia and Ukraine, we have so many fluctuations in prices. I think that building more wind power farms and hydropower plants would have impacts on our climate and environment. we have decision-making within the community and lots of things that are discussed. We have like a workshop with tools and sharing and stuff like that. Moreover, I can provide adequate heating for my home, but in the winter, our heat pumps will work until minus 5 degrees, therefore we have to use electric heating to provide adequate heating.

Quotes

Burning wood instead of using electricity to save money-everyone almost knows everyone-

Keywords

Indoor temperature, insulate windows, urban gardening, ENOVA

RL3_NO05, Norway, Olia, the young electrician man who is fond of solar panels and renewable energy resources, lives alone in one of the old buildings at Trondheim.

Narrative

I am 20 years old. I work as an electrician. I live alone in Trondheim.

At my apartment, my property owner has not fixed the electrical and the fuse to my dishwasher when I am using and stove; for example, they cannot easily be replaced by new cables, and it is not a challenging thing to do. When I go out, I turn off the electricity in the room. But if I stay in one room, I take off the lights and all the electricity except my refrigerator, of course, when I am in another room.

We have something like ENOK energy efficiency. In my workplace, we have it, and the government has this plan if you, for example, install solar panels or certain things that help your house be more efficient than now, which loses electricity because you get support for that. In Norway, many houses are old, which is necessary to give people the initiative to change the old parts of their buildings.

I am very fond of solar panels. There is a powerhouse building in Trondheim, and I always say it is like an avocado. On the roof, there are solar panels. In the summer months, it generates electricity for the entire building, which is gigantic, and two following buildings use it. And that is the efficiency of solar panels when the sun is directed towards the panels. But it also works in the winter.

And it works best in the northern countries because of the light on the solar panels. So, the sun produces ten times the energy we use on earth. So the materials will be easier to break down. For example, if solar panels production in third-world countries, we can give them. So they will have a better living.

Quotes

In the south of Trondheim Prices are high and not good. In winter we need more heat.

Keywords

Wave power, solar panels, community collaboration , financial aids, ENOK

RL3_NO06, Norway, Lora, a Brazilian divorced woman and mother of two children, sees the Norwegian language as a challenge to finding a proper job. She received financial support from X bank to provide her own local job.

Narrative

I am from Brazil. I am 44 years old. I have two children. I got divorced. I have been in Trondheim for five years. Finding a job here is very difficult. Because we should learn the Norwegian language and my Norwegian language is not good; to be honest. I have a job now but I could not find another job because I have shoulder pain and I did surgery and that is why I have some problems finding a suitable job. For me, it does not sound like a big problem but for other people is.

I have problems with the windows that are not exactly very isolated.

They are wasting a lot of energy. we use a lot of wood. In Brazil, we use a lot of gas. this is the significant difference between my home country and here, but to be honest I do not know if it is too dangerous to cook with gas here because everything is made of wood.

I have had problems paying all the bills lately. I have my car. My car has better enough to drive to school and come back to school to bring my kids up and down.

We organise like a bread sharing here in my backyard every Saturday. We have a lot of bread and a lot of vegetables. some years ago, I went to X bank and asked them to give me financial support for starting the composting project. they helped me and cover the fees. Now, I have my small compost car. Now I have my greenhouse.

most of us work in our gardens because we want to get local foods from our gardens. I share my washing machine with others in our laundry room.

Quotes

We share most of our equipment's.



We have community gardens and share our vegetables and foods with each other.

Buses are not really good here and I have to use my own car.

Keywords

Sharing, community gardens, composts, fossil fuel car

RL3_NO07, Norway, Sonia, a Danish family woman, from a low-income family, likes to participate in concise and clear community energy schemes.

Narrative

I am Danish, and I have been here in Trondheim for 10 years. I live in a community with 200 people living in this neighbourhood. I have been a highly active part of this community for the last ten years. I am a social worker, and I also study. I have two kids, and I am married. I only share my water heater with my neighbours. The electricity prices have been fixed during these years, and I am still looking for changes in these years.

I try to keep the home temperature between 16 to 18 degrees Celsius, and my family and I wear warmer clothes during cold days. We have firewood that we use to get the temperature a bit up. But energy prices are rising, especially in the winter and cold days. I do not want to use less energy, but I try not to use more than my needs. I live in an old house, and we need more money to renovate it. Still, we try to fix the problems. For example, we isolate our windows, or I will use heavy curtains during the winter, and whenever we have a heavy windy day, I put something behind my walls to keep home warm.

There was a community project some years ago, and they encouraged us to use solar panels. But the problem was that we are from a low-income family, and how could we handle this without governmental support? There have been so many groups in recent years. I have participated in most of them, but the problem is that they are just receiving information from us, but when the time for feedback is, they disappear! They were never clear and concise, and their time frame needed to be more precise; they did not give us financial support, so all the people are now exhausted from these groups. Because they are just theory, but in practice, they do nothing for us.

Quotes

Community projects should be concise, with details and time frames, and the participant's role should be identified.

People are collaborating, and we have social integration.

Keywords

Urban gardening, sharing, collaboration, financial support

RL3_NO08, Norway, Vigo is a self-efficient family man because he has a small house. He works with a-project to use renewable energy.

Narrative

I am 41 years old. I'm from a small mountain village in Norway.

I have studied drama and film and I sort of ended up by chance in Trondheim. And also by chance in the media, I'm a journalist, so I work on the radio and I work with podcasts, so I work with sound." "I ended up in Trondheim five years ago. There was a poster on Facebook that said would you like to build your own house? And my wife and I had just been talking about it that we wanted to build something together and, in this way, we sort of." "We thought, yeah. What? What the heck? We can just build it right next to where we live. We lived just perhaps 500 meters away from our new home at that time. Just on the other side of the railroad. So we started to build together with four other families and we built houses and moved in some years ago and I've been living here since." "I like it. It reminds me a bit of the mountain village where I come from because everyone knows everyone in this neighbourhood. And they don't have to be friends, but they know quite a lot of their neighbours, and that's where I like that. I like the possibility to hang outside and talk to neighbours, and yeah, it doesn't get it's very social." "We haven't been affected by the increase in energy prices and bills. Uh, until this year, because our houses are very energy efficient, they are quite small. So we are four people in 70 square feet and it's sort of it's a 2 and ½-story house. So we a lot of the heat just goes further up in the upper floors and it's pretty good, uh insulated. It's not as insulated as modern

houses are. They are more like a Norwegian cabin's standard. We have 15 centimetres walls and 20 centimetres. Roofs and floors. So it's a breathing house. [...] We have noticed that the energy prices have gone up and plus this year we bought house number two. It is a lower standard second home where we can go and stay on the weekends [...] So we have started to notice the different power bills.

We have a lot of old cold houses here in Trondheim, and some of them have not yet been refitted with new electrical wiring and so it's prone to accidents" "Many families in this neighbourhood have a lot of houses that instead have reinstalled modern chimneys to encourage wood heating." "We are currently working together with a project in Trondheim. Because they want to explore how we could as a community creates and share a power grid, our own power grid, using solar panels, windmills, et cetera to create our own energy and share it internally, but also perhaps sell it out to the open market. So that's the current bottom-up initiative I know" "I have noticed an increase in the demand for wood. People prefer to heat their homes using wood instead of other increasingly expensive energy sources. This, however, causes greater local pollution dictated by the fumes from the chimneys. This means that we need to implement electrical systems. However, this is a problem because many of the families do not own the houses, but a sort of tenants. There are non-profit associations that allow the house to be rented from the municipality of Trondheim. These associations should bear the costs of carrying out the energy improvement interventions." "The economical situations of the families and the persons in my neighbourhood are complex. It is because this historical it has been a low-income neighbourhood. It was some first base mainly all farmers that came here by boat and they had their houses with them. So, but it has been a workers' area and in the 80s young anarchists moved in and sort of justice moved into the old houses because people had started moving away from here. [...] So new people came here in the 80s and occupied it, it sort of became the low rent area and then it was a young people, anarchists, punks, artists, musicians and sort of they have. It has stayed like that for students. Of course, it has stayed like that for many years, and it sort of still is. But it has come. It has mixed in sort of teachers and doctors and architects. So it's a very mixed area and some people have sort of normal income but they just like the social, the neighbourhood feeling but it's a low rent area. The most expensive here is probably 6000 kroner a month to rent. That's quite cheap in Trondheim.

Quotes

The economical situations of the families and the persons in my neighbourhood are complex. It is because this historical it has been a low-income neighbourhood.

Keywords

Low-income family, wood, electrical system, insulation, chimneys, cost of energy

RL3_NO09, Norway, Gigi, an immigrant with a disability, lives with his wife and child. He thinks Norway is paradise because we can use our own national resources. He has good energy consumption behaviour.

Narrative

The respondent is an immigrant, he has a disability and his family is relatively low income. He lives on a pension from a foreign country, which is lower than a common pension here in Norway and his wife has only recently secured a job as cleaner in a hotel, (I believe full time), they have a son living with them and they have a daughter living in another country who is enrolled at the university.

I spend about 700Kkr per month in the summer months and 2000Kkr in the winter months. The energy costs do not impact significantly on my budget and energy costs seem to me cheaper here than in my country of origin. These costs compared to other costs are not too high, they amount at about 12-14% of my monthly rent, while in my country they impacted much more. It is true that here the houses are better insulated than in my country. I didn't pay attention to this matter when I moved here but it is important, so I hope to buy a property at some point and in that case I will pay attention to the energy class, because you get also some advantages, for example with banks for mortgages, or with house insurance contracts, which cost less. I am not aware of schemes of the municipality to support citizens for energy costs, I don't think they exist if not for those cases of citizens that have unpaid bills because they don't have enough money to pay for their basic expenses, in which case they get support also for their bills by the "municipality bank". Nevertheless speaking with Norwegians I hear many people complaining of increased energy prices, probably things got worse recently because of the international context, in the last year. Despite this I believe that Norway compared to other countries is still a "paradise" because we can use national energy sources and this is a big advantage. This country is lucky because can help people in need but if I know people that get support, I am not aware, perhaps they would not tell me out of confidentiality, I only often hear complaints of expensive energy costs. At home I am the one that is in charge of taking care of budgeting, spending and making sure that we don't waste but despite we try to avoid wasting occasionally happens, so I try to tell my family members to switch off lights, leds and even underfloor heating where isn't used. We set the thermostat at 21 degrees but if in some rooms we seldom stay, we deactivate the underfloor heating. In terms of mobility we use only car sharing and then I have a scooter but I don't use it much, we use mostly public transport. An awareness campaign I believe should be put in place by the authorities to make people more aware of energy issues because many people often act only based on their personal feelings, particularly in the largest cities of Norway, it would be useful. The only campaign that I have noticed is about making people more aware of using public transport. I think the price of public transport is a bit excessive

though, off course in relation to my income, even though I see that now they have some promotional campaigns but it is also true that we get a good service, I believe is excellent right now. I don't use the scooter much, mostly to meet people of my scooter club but I prefer public transport for daily movements. I know little about community energy schemes, I know only the case here in Trondheim, but I am not sure how is easy to replicate. Surely I would be interested if something like that would come up in my neighbourhood because I feel the environmental problem like my problem too. I believe that the environmental problem is connected with the current global problems, in relation to foods or emissions of economies like China for example. I believe that grassroots movements can influence in Norway and elsewhere the decision of extracting more oil and creating more oilfields, this is the case in Norway for example where recent news reported that following protests by grassroots groups some plans of new oilfields in the north will be stopped. A good thing of Norway is that, compared with my country of origin, children receive since the youngest age a sensibilisation regarding environmental issues, I believe that this is very positive and I think that also in my homeland would be good to have more education for children. Also educating children to the outdoor conditions is a way to make them more aware of the environment, which I see that here is very common.

Quotes

I feel that the environmental problem is my problem.

Keywords

Energy costs, affordability, energy efficiency, environmental education, awareness campaigns, grassroots environmental groups.

RL3_NO10, Norway, Paolo, separated, one son, underqualified because the Norwegian education system does not recognise his qualifications

Narrative

I'm 43 of age, an immigrant, born and grow up in one of the European countries. I moved to Norway for love. Now I'm staying for love to a little boy." "Currently, I work in retail, due

to the fact that my formal education is not accepted here in Norway” “When I came to Norway it was baffling for me to see how the warming of housing, in a climate that is so cold, is actually provided by electricity. But then thinking yeah, but they have a whole lot of energy sources here live like with the hydrogen plants and whatnot, so that might not be an issue. But then on the other side of the spectrum, I was baffled at how expensive I found the kilowatt hours. So, I tried to figure out what is the issue here. And I came from my personal opinion to the conclusion that the majority of the houses are not properly insulated, I believe as compared to housing in another European country. And when it comes to the energy itself, I mean, considering that we have the possibility to as humans, not speaking to gather unlimited amounts of energy from the sun, or from the wind or whatever, and actually also having the economic power here in Norway to do so. The fact that it is not happening, plus the fact that the network is set up in a manner so as for the energy providers, they can’t even properly sell their product.” “Here in Trondheim, we produce a lot of energy. The energy here is cheap, but we do not have the infrastructure to sand itself” “we end up selling it to other country who then sells it back to our brothers and sisters in the battle in the south, sometimes for revenue of up to 20/30 times the amount that we pay here, which is like ridiculous I want to say because we’re talking about a resource that we’re producing that is a resource of Norway, which means not just Trondheim but also our brothers down south. So it is, it is absolutely baffling to me, but I don’t have the intellect or education to come up with a solution.” “It’s almost like let’s say you’re at the edge of a cliff and you see a blind person walking towards and he falls over. I mean, it’s a terrible tragedy, but not his fault. He simply didn’t know better. [...] And I see that person going towards the cliff, and I don’t stop him then I am at fault, because I could have made a change and that is not the case here.

They take money, which has no intrinsic value, unless it’s been used, and put it in some sort of a hot pole and call it the Oil Fund. Rather than investing in something that actually give something back, whether it be quality of life to its own population, or like rather, they invest the money weirdly, or real estate, so that they can make revenues out of it. We don’t need revenue. We already have money. What we don’t have is for example, free dental health care. You can break it all the way down to existential fear. But then you can also go on the other side of the spectrum and say, Hey, what we’re harnessing here is given the structures that we build up in society and everything being completely dependent on energy, whether it be consumer products, or whether it be something has it’s existential, like a hospital that needs energy, like we’re producing electricity as a nation, and it should be distributed in such a manner, meaning that assuming 5 million Norwegians 5 million of what is being produced is mine. And the people should have access to it. And, of course, it comes at a cost to produce energy. So I’m not saying energy should be for free. Even though that could be accomplished with one or two. But the distributor channels are not properly set. I’ve heard about a gym that closes its doors now on Sundays and Saturdays because the heating is too expensive. Those might be very luxurious complaints to have but considering where we are. I think there’s place for those complaints. Because at the end of the day, we’re not in what I’m from, we’re not poor, we’re wealthy, and it should be reflected within the infrastructure. So I personally think the fact that we have to sell energy turned a lot. It’s ridiculous like I would if I was a farmer, I wouldn’t sell my tomatoes to then buy tomatoes at a higher price. [...] I for example, live in a very old house that is not properly insulated. If that were to happen in a winter month, and it would be like an extended period of time, then it can go

as far as being an existential fear, especially considering having small children in the house. So it's a fairly wide topic and I don't really know where to go with it, if I'm quite honest. But what we're creating is something that we create from within our country with resources and power of the country from the people and I do not think we're doing it to the benefit of the people. From where my place is in society, what I experience is talking about the situation, but no action and this is something that now from a foreigner's perspective that has been raised with a different culture, different mentality. I have a different predisposition to structures of power. I don't see the general Norwegian as someone that complains I don't know why that is. I don't know if that will ever change or how many years it would take but I do not see a big uproar other than maybe someone being interviewed that has a higher electricity bill. By I do not see Norwegians going into the streets.

Quotes

We don't need revenue. We already have money. What we don't have is for example, free dental health care

Keywords

Energy, Norway, baffled, housing, existential, complains, invest, compare, sell, power, expensive

RL3_AT01, Austria, Solar self-building initiative

Narrative

My name is Roni, I work in a small town in the mid of Austria. Now I am almost 60 years old. Our children have moved and live now in two different cities, my husband is usually away during the week. I go a few days a week by car to work in the nature park office, it's about 20 km to get to work, I commute by car, the return trip with public transport does not work at all. In our countryside it is not possible to commute with the public transport. There was once in the past a feasible public transport by bus, but with my flexible working hours it does not work out. First of all, people are scattered, and with the flexible working hours it doesn't work out either. For us, if you add it up, transport is expensive, I spend around 2000 euros a year. Yes, you have to drive to work, I cannot organise it in a

different way, even if you can do home office in the meantime, commuters drive 50km for one way, or weekly commuters go much further. When it concerns energy and its costs you need to have a good overview of the financial situation, then you have a chance to save costs. For us, crisis resistance is important, even if the electricity power goes off. We have a combination wood stove for cooking. The family also has a forest share and there is enough fire wood available. Overall, our household always needs a good stock at home as the next bigger store is 10 km away.

Together with my husband I live in a family house. We have built it about 30 years ago, there was no alternative on how to heat and we used oil heating until recently, that was the usual solution a few decades ago and it has always worked well. When we built 30 years ago, oil was still extremely cheap, that was the non plus ultra, and at that time one did not think so much, what it means for the environment... but the own consciousness changes. What can one contribute on a small scale?“. When building 30 years ago, there was a solar self-build initiative for water heating. For us, the self-build initiative was very important, we were involved and it worked great. There were evening meetings, later all the parts were delivered, finally the parts were mounted on the roof by yourself. We had help from the installer who was part of the group. Another installer supervised the project, he also ordered all the parts, it worked perfectly. He was from the area, a little further away. There were many interested people in the group, they were living in close villages, one there, one there, quite scattered over the district.

We were involved in the first group of the self-build initiatives. The electrical installation was done by my husband, the whole project worked flawlessly. My husband was always attending the meetings; I was at home with the kids. The meetings were more technical. Overall, it was relatively cheap to self-build the solar installation compared to the price of a building or installation company.

The lectures today are rather not emphasizing to say “do it yourself”. Yes, the situation was very interesting, the group of man in the initiative worked together and built the system. As well when the materials were delivered, that was interesting. To help out among each in the self-building initiative was very important, also some family members participated. Each had to help out the others. In the beginning, a neighbour helped out and explained how it’s done, the neighbour was a plumber and he also contributed his share and so on. In the 30 years we have replaced only 2 panes of glass, which works perfectly...

I don’t know if today there are still such initiatives. The way people live has changed a lot, we were not even in our mid-20s when we built the house, we had a lot of friends who helped us during weekends. That solidarity doesn’t exist anymore. People want to have a work-life-balance, which I think is good, they want to enjoy life. Some are happy to have Friday off, we were brought up differently. There are still the “makers”, they are doing their projects, but for the others? We have thermally renovated the house, now we have switched our heating to pellets. Considering the price, there is no longer a difference between oil or pellets, they have also gone up (in price). Important is the will to change and a strong environmental thought. It is your own decision. Considering photovoltaics, we are thinking about the exact place where we can integrate PV panels on the roof but the alignment of our house is unfavourable. My brother, for example, has upgraded with photovoltaics on his house and roof.

Yesterday we went for a walk and I noticed that everyone runs photovoltaics, almost all of the relatively new houses have one, also older houses have mostly equipped with

photovoltaics In order to have enough money, you have to wait until the kids are out, then you can afford it.

Quotes

We really wanted to get rid from heating with oil!

In our situation it's difficult, the only thing you can do in our region is to heat water with solar power, that pays off. You have also the option of photovoltaics to become eco-friendlier, but there aren't many other options as long as we are so dependent on cars.

The heating and cooking with the kitchen stove costs almost nothing.

A few days during the year you need to work hard. You cut the wood or you are chipping the wood at home to have it ready.... now I'm not always at home, but actually I don't want to miss heating or cooking with the stove and we also like to be independent.

Keywords

Solar self-building; change to eco-friendly heating; investing when children are out of the house

RL3_AT02, Austria, 0

Narrative

I am Jana, I am 39 and live as a single mother with my two kids in a small city in Austria. My children are below ten and my elder son started just his apprenticeship. My income is small and it is hard to cover all expenses, for every expense I need to be careful with costs and there is hardly any purchase I can do without thinking about the costs. Indeed, it's pity and unfair that those who work hard have difficulties with income, while those who fully rely on the social system and know how to navigate through all the rules and receive all available social services that I even do not know.

Indeed, there is a mismatch of energy expenses but also food expenses with people like me and my family. My son needs to enjoy a good meal including also meat as he works hard, a simple soup is not enough. Often additional expenses tighten my budget, for instance I had to repay some of the alimony to my ex-partner and father of the children as my older son started to work that year. Now my son also contributes from his income to

cover the expenses. The father enjoys some tax relief because he pays alimony, but this does not reflect on our monthly budget. He can work full time, but for us poverty is an imminent danger. I have rented a flat in a protected building, so I live in an old house in the centre of the small city t. During summer it is enjoyable fresh, but during wintertime the situation becomes difficult and we do not heat all rooms, the sleeping room is not heated at all.

We use district heating but I also have an additional stove for cooking in the kitchen, I try to save energy as much as possible because my income is very limited. For the past year I had to pay back 400 Euro for the past heating period. This comes in addition to the 250 Euro monthly cost of energy. We always switch off lights to save energy. Indeed, my smaller son understands that we have to save energy, my older son does not fully participate in my efforts. We have also isolated the windows, but as this is a protected and recently renovated building we cannot do more. The house itself is not isolated. It is indeed good to work in the next building and I do not need a car to commute. I could do without the car, but this is impossible in our rural region, we cannot organise our live without a car. Planning is an important issue, we have to organise ourselves better than people living in a larger town, there you find many offers for leisure.

Still, the rural area also has its plus. We can grow something, we can make preserves, and we can use a wooden stove for cooking.

For the stove I have bought firewood from a friend and the price was good. This helps us with heating and we are a bit independent from electricity. When we entered the flat I asked to use the chimney connection as they wanted to wall it up. When there is an electricity black out an all collapses you can still heat and cook, there a strong dependency on electricity, it is almost an addiction.

With the stove you can heat up food, you can heat up a bit and save economically. I have heard from initiatives but as I rent the flat I cannot be part of a photovoltaic initiative, to participate you need to have an own house. One will not install a photovoltaic unit on a roof that is not your own. My mother has a solar installation for warm water and now also a photovoltaic installation on the roof, so I am well informed how this works and indeed home owners have better chances to take part. One difference is that the owners receive public support from the region when they install photovoltaics.

I do not have the financial capacities or savings to make such investment as I am much concerned with my own financial situation and I purely cannot afford to participate.

Quotes

I don't think you can be part of it as a tenant, to be part of an initiative you have to own your own home, otherwise you can't contribute, that's something different. You will not build something on a roof that is not yours.

For the photovoltaics people have different reasons, some build a PV because of the public funding, others think of the environment.

I do without one room, the bedroom I don't heat at all, I turn off the light as much as I can. Purchases... I could do without the car, but it's not possible in our countryside.

Keywords

Participation in PV installations with rental situation; energy poverty; back-up heating with stove; listed building

RL3_AT03, Austria, Efforts for a district heating in our village

Narrative

I am Caroline, and I live 10 km to the south of a small village close to the border with the next county. I am 62 and I live there with my husband, he is retired and I still go to work. Our three children have moved to other villages around and also to cities. Our small village lives from Tourism and farming, often the wood processing is a dominant sector of the economy. Of course I need a car to go to work, there are purely no employment opportunities in the proximity of my house. I live with my husband and my father in law also lives in the same house, so we have two households. He is 91 years old and he needs a certain comfort temperature as he is not so mobile as a young person. We did some efforts thermally isolate the house but we have often problems with mould, this is unhealthy but we got used to have an imperfect isolation of the house. With regards to electricity energy we experience a current increase of price, now the price has almost doubled within a year. We have a contract with the electricity provider of the small town since many years and we are not affected by the close down of another electricity provider nearby. Our village is surrounded by a forest area, so many of the woods are cut with a periodicity of 25-40 years. With my husband we have been running a wood transport business for a long time and also my family has its own forests. From our business as wood transporters we have a good insight in the pricing of firewood and all related costs. My husband has a larger and well equipped workshop where he does repair of all kind of works, this is the remain of our previous business. He is retired and now he does many small repair and restauration work, but he gets only partially payment for his work. We have been in contact with an engineer who advised us on the electricity consumption in the workshop but I cannot remember the outcome.

We have to maintain two households within the house and our energy consumption is rather high, we also have to keep lights on during night as the oldest person in the house might need assistance during night. I do not understand why buildings like churches or castles need to be so much lighted, this is a waste of precious resources and there is no benefit at all. The same applies to the Christmas illumination, I cannot understand this kind of lighting. We heat our house with a relatively modern wood central heating. The installed wood gasifier burner is efficient; it is manually operated. In the

kitchen we have a wood fired cooking stove and during winter we cook and heat the kitchen with it. Traditionally we use lump wood, we have a say, “when you heat with wood you get at least six times warm”, especially when you include all the many steps of work and including the wood splitting, storage and carrying it to the kitchen or to the heater, then this becomes true.

As we have been in the wood business for a long time we are well informed about the market price of wood and the service costs for forest services. We know very well the transport costs and we use empty transportation so or so to be travelled by truckers to get wood delivered at minimal expenses.

Years ago, there was an initiative to build a district heating system together with other neighbours, but we were not allowed to. It would have been good for everyone to build such a plant for district heating. We calculated the costs for the plant and the costs for running it ourselves, but we couldn't do that. It would have made heating with firewood much easier. We have from our previous business the storage rooms and technically it would not be complicated. Finally, the municipality didn't encourage it, maybe they wanted to build a plant themselves. But to the moment we did not fully understand why we were not entitled to make that move. It would have paid off for all of us, we get along well with each other, our neighbourhood is good and people always help each other, that's the case with everyone, including the younger generation.

We are interested to install photovoltaics on our house, but we have to see if the power line has enough capacity. You need a lot of time with the lump, you have to work a lot, six times you get warm with the wood.

Quotes

Years ago we wanted to build a district heating system with neighbours, but we weren't entitled to do it, we didn't understand why our group wasn't allowed to do that. We had the storage rooms, but the municipality didn't entitle us it because they wanted to build a plant themselves, and there is still no plant.

Keywords

District heating; firewood resources; legal constraints for initiatives; solidarity

RL3_AT04, Austria, Non-renovation case of more than 20 flats

Narrative



My name is Fritz; I live in a part of a small town in the middle of Austria where in the eighties new modern buildings were erected. Here I live alone, I am retired and now I stay more at home than previously, before retiring I commuted to work.

I think that there is certainly a lot of talk about saving, such as stand-by mode appliances or rooms that remain unheated when not occupied, in total savings might be only a few percent, but that also makes a difference in the end.

There is certainly a lot of talk about saving, such as unused consumers or rooms that are not occupied, but in total it may only be a few percent, but that also makes a difference. I am owner of an apartment, our house was built 40 years ago, a solar system was installed as an experiment to heat the water. This proved to be an economic solution, during summer the hot water is pre-heated with solar energy. We use a 5000 litre storage tank for more than 20 flats for pre-heating, and this means a basic solar pre-heating is achieved. During night tariff the water is reheated to consumption temperature by use of a special electricity night tariff. Every flat in our house is still equipped with an additional oven connection, but you can hardly use this for heating purpose, it is more meant to be a back-up option for the owner. Beside that solar system all our apartments are totally dependent on electricity; our house was a showcase project of good practice in the 1980s, especially for the modern clean and affordable use of electricity especially for the heating. I can regulate the heating myself, each flat has an electric meter, otherwise we are not flexible. Somehow I think the entire house needs to be renovated as it is not up to date, especially in view of the harshly increasing electricity prices there is an important challenge ahead of us. With electricity, our local electricity supplier maintains a rather low energy price, from 7.7 cents per kWh, now they've gone up to 19 cents, which is also a lot. Recently a local private electricity producer serving 4000 clients has ceased operations, he has a hydroelectric power plant but recently a storm destroyed part of the hydropower plant. In the end he had to buy electricity from the open market, in he was close to retirement, but also higher requirements for the renewal of the hydropower plant influenced his decision to close his business and cease all his clients. His former customers have to look for new suppliers. Customers in the area are taken over by the local power grid, the others are covered by the neighbouring grid but new customers start around the price of 40 cents per kWh. I'm glad I'm with our supplier. I need more than 10,000 kWh including the heating (that is 8000 kWh). But this also depends on the heating season. I'm just someone who doesn't want to sit inside with a jacket and a pointed cap, there has to be a moderate temperature and comfort in my home.

As it is a house of more than 20 owners, we hold so called owner meetings to decide on investments. Last time the issue of (full-) isolating the house was proposed. However, three scenarios were presented and only one included the full thermic isolation, you need a significant amount of costs to receive a subsidy for this type of renovation. Still, any other renovations have to be covered solely by the owners. We can finance joint projects either from the savings on the owners account or we decide to get a loan from the bank and pay later with our monthly service fee.

During the last owners meeting different proposals were discussed. One included the general renovation perspective of most urgent issues where imminent danger occurs, another included a wider perspective facilitating the erection of elevators and the partial renovation of the roof but also smaller repairs. The last proposal included a proposal for the entire renovation and modernisation of the apartment housing that included new isolation, special renovation of the roof and more weather exposed parts of the building

and so on. As you can imagine, the decision was to solve only the most urgent issues as the costs for each flat of the costlier proposals were high. It is a majority decision; whereby non-presence is also counted as a “no”. At the owners’ meeting I’m sure 2/3 were women and they said we can’t afford it. There are many considerations for that vote. There is a difference in which flat you live. There are some flats where you have a roof and two outside walls, others have only one outside wall and benefit from the neighbours’ heating. Why should I pay 300€ on top of the monthly service fee? Maybe, that’s our selfish time.

Unfortunately, I have to look for an alternative solution as I live in the last floor, I want to insulate inside, there’s only the concrete ceiling, I will have all the costs alone, but I have to get the agreement of the other owners.

There is an important point, the general knowledge or understanding of the subject is not equal. This lack of knowledge then makes for a bad result. For instance, the additional costs per square metre can be calculated by everyone. But often the added value of the flat that results from the renovation is forgotten. Moreover, it’s about a perspective for 50 years, many retired older people live here who say it’s none of their business any more, that’s difficult. But they have to decide whether something should happen. The pros and cons are not explained to the people, not everyone has a knowledge or understanding of the subject. The awareness-raising work is necessary if one wants to save energy and with a long term perspective, certainly there is a lot of talk about saving electricity, also small changes make a difference.

Quotes

Considering building insulation involving many parties and owners, people are not told the pros and cons, not everyone has a knowledge or understanding of the subject. This lack of knowledge produces a poor result. The costs are presented, the additional costs per m² can be calculated by everyone. Often, the added value of the flat that results from the renovation is forgotten.

To make a difference requires a lot of effort, it’s about a perspective for 50 years, many retired older people live here who say it’s none of their business, it’s difficult. But they have to decide if something should happen.

RL3_AT05, Austria, Family house owner: from a 4-head family to a retired couple - pioneering and disillusionment

Narrative

My name is Franz and I live in a small village at almost 00 m above sea level, normally we have cold winters but this changed in the last years. I am living with my wife in a house that we built more than 30 years ago. Since 10 years our children have left to study and live now in their own houses. I fully enjoy the first years of my retirement and I cannot complain about my pension but prices are increasing and many challenges for us and the future generations are becoming more clear. As my children have left the house, I live with my wife now in a house that was built for 4 persons.

Our heating comes from a woodchip heating system, it was erected by a group of farmers, it provides the heating for around 10 buildings and works with waste timber. We are proud that we use our local resources from the forest. We do not use oil for heating, but there are still houses close by that are dependent on oil. As our children are living elsewhere we still need to maintain a minimum temperature for all rooms, the water in the pipes must not freeze.

When we built the house I was one of the first with a solar installation. I joined a solar-self build group of 7-8 persons and we built a very simple heating installation on the roof. This works since more than 30 years. At the time of building, the solar collector initiatives received a grant from the county and an engineer from a place 80km from here organised the group. From May to October our hot water supply comes from our solar collector and this saves much expenses and is good for the environment.

Since my retirement I have more time to look on the energy consumption, I think of isolating the house, we had no big budget when we built it, I have changed recently the windows. 10 years ago I put a photovoltaic on the roof and annually I need around 1800kWh from the electricity provider. Actually I produce 6 kWh peak, but during winter I need more electricity than I produce and I want to optimise with the installation of an energy storage package in the house. It is always a question of cost, who can afford something like this, do we have accessible subsidies for it? There is an important issue that concerns the knowledge related to energy. I have often experienced discussions about energy consumption. Often people do not know how much energy they consume. This much relates to district heating, values are almost unknown and often MW and kW are mixed up. People do not know about the quantities and many discussions are not fact based. Those who heat with oil see the number of litres and the increasing price, but others do not have a sense for the energy consumption. For instance, the discussion about the Christmas lighting is not substantial, here the values are misinterpreted. When one goes without serious reason 50km by car and compares this with the energy saved from some small Christmas lighting that comes with minor energy quantities I can see people lack the knowledge. People need to understand this better, I see very often the lack of knowledge related to energy issues. I see a big challenge ahead of us. We hear that our district is on the way to become energy self-catering, anyhow, we do not have any factory in the district that would consume large quantities of electricity. I think the change has to come bottom up, from the small consumer and everyone has to contribute, it will not work out otherwise.

On the other hand, if I produce photovoltaics energy, the electricity network capacities will be exhausted and we have to find better solutions. We wonder if there is no small valley where a hydropower plant would take on the excess energy during sunny days that can be released at a later point of time. The issue is that without the support

from the public and sufficient storage capacities all the small producers will just be switched off from the grid once the capacities are exhausted and much of the energy will be wasted. I have heard that hydropower storage capacities in Austria can cover the energy consumption for 14 hours, in Germany this is around 40 minutes, we need to set more public measures to find a way out of this dilemma. I have heard about a pilot installation in our district, where photovoltaic energy is turned in Hydrogen, one can participate with buy shares from 500€ to 5000€, I read this in the local district news. Our way of producing energy intensive goods as steel in Leoben at VOEST cannot be sustained, but there are no alternative product niches, there is no re-orientation that we can see. The increase of the price for natural gas now still coming from Russia will have huge impact for the economy, private households are not connected to natural gas here and only a few heat with liquefied gas (LPG), but the industry is heavily dependent on this resource. For the future also the public needs to contribute to the private efforts, this is the only way out of the current crisis. The big disillusionment is yet to come.

Quotes

I have always been a pioneer, I moved into our house in 1989. We had already installed a solar system back then, we were part of a self-construction group.” “For the future also the public needs to contribute to the private efforts, this is the only way out of the current crisis. The big disillusionment is yet to come.

Basically, everyone is called upon to contribute to such a change, I mean the energy transition, such a change must start from the bottom up, from the smallest consumer, it cannot be determined from above. Everyone has to make a small contribution, otherwise it won't work.

All our industry has been happy to have cheap energy for decades, everyone has benefited. Now there's the big hue and cry, that's quite clear. We have lived well with cheap energy, but how will we change the entire economy or industry that consumes a lot? That will be an exciting story.

Keywords

Family house; energy storage; role of subsidies for private energy production

RL3_AT06, Austria, Photovoltaics challenge of farmers



Narrative

My name is Filip, I am 32 and I live with my family in a rural village, . My family has a long family tradition with our dairy farm and we also have a forest. I continue this tradition and I live with my wife and our tow children on the farm. We live in a scattered rural village in Styria and some kilometres from our municipality town. Our farm has an annual production of 400.000kg of milk from around 50 milk cows. When I took over the farm from my parents I had to take serious decisions and I invested in a half automatic milking system. I am proud that I have taken this investment, but all investments come with many long-term obligations. Now milk prices are good but some years ago this was not the case and we were hard at risk, we have also developed a special business niche with horse riding on the farm. I am strongly affected from the water shortage in 2022 and I have invested with a neighbour two years ago 50.000€ to prospect new tapping water sources. There are many uncertainties, last year we mowed our meadows 4 times, this year only 3 times, maybe in the future only twice. It is an exciting time, our main product, milk, is very well paid at the moment, we can cover the increased costs. We don't know what it will be in a year, we produce 400,000 kg of milk annually. Our second economic pillar is forestry, there is work and substantial income during winter. The old stone walls of one metre cannot be renovated at all. Yes, we could do heat insulation. But we don't care about heating energy, we heat with our own wood. If 15m³ more wood chips are used for heating in winter, it doesn't matter. You have to do something to get the wood chips, it takes time, but the financial costs are very low for us. For almost 30 years there was a pensioner who used to heat with logs and who fetched the leftovers from our forest, mainly branches and stumps that were not used anyway. So there is wood in our forest that just has to be fetched by someone. We certainly have wood in the forest for 5 family homes that is not being used. It is additional work for us to clear it up in the forest. We have been planning a photovoltaic system for a long time. Since 2007 we tried to get subsidies, but without subsidies it was not cost-covering. We couldn't get the subsidies at all. Subsidies were organised as a first comes - first serves system and we were sitting with three computers, ready to go when the subsidy were released on the province webpage and we tried again and again without success. It was very frustrating. Finally, we built a photovoltaic system 2 years ago. We got 12,000 euros in funding and the system will pay for itself in a few years, five years at the most. We are extremely lucky. With the current electricity costs, we would pay 10.000€ more than a year ago, so the photovoltaic system extremely helps. We need about 45 thousand kWh per year for the household and diary farming. The feed-in tariff is currently 52 cents from ÖMAG, the central electricity buyer in Austria. I used to get 8 cents per kWh a year ago. For the purchase I pay 34 cents. At the moment we can store 20 kWh, but even in summer the energy storage , our battery is empty after 3 or 4 hours, and during night the farm also needs a lot of electricity. It is not possible to become self-sufficient; often the weather is cloudy, or like last winter when the photovoltaic system was covered with snow for a month. The investment itself would not be that high, but it is not possible at all to run the system without external energy. In an emergency we switch on the diesel power generator, we have several thousand litres of diesel stored in reservoirs.

I have an old contract that allows me to feed in the grid 19kW, you can't get such a good contract anymore. At the moment, the most you can feed in is the 5kW as guaranteed by law. I wanted to set up a large photovoltaic system on a meadow that is

very steep and can hardly be maintained, but the electricity line capacities are simply limited. We can feed in here within the local network and the close by transformer. Finally at the larger transformer station in close by we can no longer feed in the higher ranked electricity transmission line. We had plans to build such a plant with our neighbours. In the larger district, three times more electricity is generated than is consumed. Indeed, the line capacities are fully booked.

In areas let's say around the second largest city in Austria, Graz, with a concentration of many consumers the feed-in is possible, there are large transformer stations and substations, the grid is well developed. The owners of the meadows next to a transformed station get 2-6 T € per hectare so that a PV can be installed there. These are the most valuable farmlands, but I understand anyone who wants to lease them for 20 years. We exchange information with our neighbours about our PV energy yields, for example, when we meet at the volunteer fire brigade, we exchange information, which is fun and you learn a lot. Many people are afraid of subsidies and possible difficulties; in our case, the electrician helped organise a subsidy. Actually, everyone can get a loan from the bank, it pays for itself and everyone has to do it, everyone can do it. Energy communities are not well known in our country; this model is rather exotic for us.

With the current feed-in tariff, which is recalculated every three months, I can't imagine that anyone would set up such energy community, it would be a loss-making business. At the moment, everyone is already thinking about saving energy. It's about costs and the environment, both. It's popular topic at the moment. I listen at work a lot to the radio. Energy saving is often about the effect on climate and the energy costs. It's not dramatic at the moment, but next year we'll have a lot to deal with the upcoming situation. It's good that people are starting to re-think what they do. Even if you now see the Christmas lights, that's already a waste of energy. The municipality runs a heating plant with wood and produces 1000kW. Often a feeder line passes by a family house, but it doesn't pay to connect it, people don't even ask. It doesn't pay to connect them because of 10-12kW, finally they would pay about 100€ a month for the hot water and heating. The municipality makes a connection at every house, but the connection costs are up to 15,000€, but you have to ask the municipality and finally you have to pay for the connection costs yourself.

Quotes

Households used to pay 150€ a month for electricity heating, suddenly they have to pay 500€ or even more, it's going to be very tight. When it comes to heating, there are certainly many who do switch off heating in some rooms or entire floors and they can save some costs. It's not very comfortable, you need to sleep on the first floor, for example. When a single parent has an income of only €1200-1300, I feel sorry for the people.

In our municipality there is no heating subsidy. There are no initiatives for social support unless there is a hardship where one can find some support from voluntary clubs.

We are glad with our situation, maybe the increased costs will eventually contribute to a true energy change.

Keywords

Farming and photovoltaics installation; feed capacities and infrastructure; new electricity provider

RL3_AT07, Austria, Energy sufficiency of a rural district and traditional free resources

Narrative

My name is Viktor and I am a retired farmer, I am 70 and I live with my wife in the upper floor of the family farmhouse, our son lives downstairs with his family. I have been running the farm for many decades and I was always interested in new developments. Our family contributes to the social life of our community and I recently stepped back from my voluntary position heading the local Natural park. The young generation has to take over. When necessary, I help out in agriculture, especially with woodcutting work, where every hand is needed, and I am experienced with the machines.

I feel deeply concerned by the current energy price increase and I am on the opinion that we have to save energy as good as we can and also the storage of energy is a hot topic for society. I have the feeling that we already have many solutions for an energy transition on the table, there is also a lot of experimentation in the region, for example there is Holzwelt Murau, which is active with pilot plants and a lot of educational work. Unfortunately, some solutions are in my opinion the result of lobbying and I cannot accept such a solution. One example is e-mobility. Here, relatively old technology is still being used to promote an old concept that suits the car manufacturers. The customer thinks he is buying an ecological car, but when I look at the raw materials and the circumstances of production of lithium or other raw materials, things look different. If child labour is involved in the production of raw materials, then that is not correct.

Economic logic and lobbying are not conducive to the green idea. There are clean solutions like hydrogen power, but the technology is not in place. Without more global solutions, I am very pessimistic.

A few months ago, the local electricity producer terminated us as electricity customers and we had to sign a new contract with next closer producer and distributor, the price is acceptable. Maybe it doesn't hit my family that hard, but when someone rents a flat or rents from a cooperative and is an employee, there is no fair solution. Someone who lives under those circumstances has no choice. My district is striving to become energy self-sufficient, and the hydroelectric power plants on the Mur river and including the side valleys are considered an appropriate resource. Recently we had very low water levels, lower than ever before. Now you simply can't build any longer a storage reservoir,

there is no longer any water to pump up. Climate change has a really strong impact on our energy industry. It has also impacted on the close down of our local electricity producer. Our electricity price is tied to the gas price, that's not quite understandable. I don't know if in the future we need to include also if nuclear power, this is a no-go for me. I can imagine that in the future the power line charges will increase as the price of energy can't go up that much. Traditionally, there was a community forest and a citizens' forest. Citizens were allowed to cut wood and use it for building or heating under a certain arrangement. The servitude also exists for forests belonging to Lambrecht Abbey, which is an important support for those who do not own a forest.

Until a few years ago, it was common for people to go and clean up the forest and receive wood for free. The wood was often given away for free by us farmers for cleaning up the forest. The branches were fetched by the people, and I often delivered it. Nowadays, people no longer have wood-burning stoves. The farmer had a benefit from this practice as well. People often approached us, but nowadays this practice does not exist any longer. There are only very few who still collect branches in the forest. No one wants to do it anymore, people are far better off nowadays. Maybe, in the current generation, doing such hard working to support oneself is not desired. At the moment, no one dares to ask when someone is in need, people are uncomfortable with that. When your household energy bill is high, you also have to get active, it's not completely free if you want to heat with wood.

In my community there has been a central heating plant organised as a cooperative since 1989; the school, the kindergarten and the whole centre of our town are supplied with heat. As a farmer, I was also involved in the founding of our still existing cooperative. Later on, a private heating plant was built in the town with modern technology, but the prototype never worked properly. Now an entrepreneur produces wood chips for pellet production. He works also in our forest with his machine. He also produces electricity and pellets, which is certainly the most important product as prices have gone up. Interesting is the latest regional initiative "Green Power". It is a regional cooperative in Murau, you can buy shares, the collected money is invested in energy production and storage of all kinds, later you will receive a dividend. I don't believe that there can be social justice in energy.

Quotes

Until a few years ago, it was common for people to come and clean up the forest, so they get wood for free. Many households have no longer a wood stove.

Economic logic and lobbying are not conducive to the green idea. There are clean solutions like hydrogen power, but they are not used yet. Without global solutions, I am very pessimistic.

I don't think there can be social justice in energy, you can look from different perspectives, but there is no fairness.

Keywords



Traditional wood resources; intergenerational understanding; responsible use of resources; climate change impact on hydropower; forced change of electricity provider; energy storage technologies

RL3_AT08, Austria, Living, traditional farming for the next generation and the energy challenge in view of a black-out

Narrative

My name is Arno and I live with my wife and our son in dispersed rural village. I am a retired farmer and together with my wife we support our younger son to take over our farm, our second son lives in a village several km from our home. Our farm produces bio-milk since many years, we have also a forest and we are a small and traditional farmer's family. In the past decades we have been often confronted with crisis situations that affected our living and working, also the milk prices were for a long time very low. As a family business we cannot separate work and living, many things are overlapping and there is no chance to separate them. We often took rather modest investment decisions about the modernisation of our farming. Also the related forest work changes over time, we aim to remain self-sustained and we try to work most operations ourselves to remain independent. We also do not like to be depended on bank loans or subsidies. However, our home and the farm are at around 1000m above sea level and there are many day-to-day challenges. We have not invested in full automatisisation of the dairy farm and we go at least two times a day to milk the cows. We cannot put responsibilities for our livestock in the hands of a machine. Whenever we modernise we carefully analyse costs and if we can contribute with own machinery or the materials. We heat our house with lump wood as we have our own forest. Considering electricity, we consume around 23 thousand kWh annually.

For the hay harvest and storage we have to dry the hay additionally in the storage, this consumes much energy. I have been confronted with the close down of our electricity provider., we had the luck to become customer of the e-Werk of the close-by town as we are part of the municipality. We expect a two-threefold increase of electricity costs for the moment.

Many years ago, there was a small hydroelectric power plant in the immediate vicinity of the house, it was operated by the neighbourhood. However, the small power plant has not been in operation for a long time, the energy generated is simply too little. We often thought about modernisation, we planned a solar system for our house, but there were always many other important investments that took priority. Actually, our economy is quite old-fashioned and traditional. We didn't want to modernise a lot and

keep depending on growth, that's a matter of attitude. For me, the question is whether the growth that we have been led to believe in for decades can really continue in the future. For us it is a question of generations. What can my generation pass on to the next generation? We have often thought about installing a PV system on the roof of the barn. An electrician friend of ours informed us very well how much it would cost. With 70,000€ we are almost self-sufficient, but only if there is really enough sunshine, the storage battery is very expensive. The younger generation, our younger son, is now the boss and he can decide for himself. Getting the budget for an investment is one side, but who will then have to pay the loan for many years? We don't want our son, who has taken over the business, to have a debt with the bank and to pay back a loan for decades. He should make this decision himself. Of course, we have all the information we need from modern sources, but it is even more important to ask friends in the area how they organise their energy supply. It has to be said that we are disadvantaged as small businesses. A large company gets good subsidies and also the minimum investment for a farm conversion or the purchase of a machine is easy for a large company. As a small farm we have only disadvantages. We have concerns whether the growth of the economy can continue forever. Climate change, but also the development of interregional transport, are major concerns for us. On the one hand, we still know many regional businesses that had to close because of competition. Now you have to travel 100 km to the next sawmill, whereas in the past it was a distance of a few kilometres.

I was strongly involved in the protests against the transit road. A large part of it has now finally been cancelled by the politicians, a true regional development is much more important than one might think. We've been thinking a lot lately about a long lasting electricity power cut, so we were wondering what would happen if there was really a blackout. Of course, we have a wood-fired kitchen oven and we certainly won't have a supply problem. But for 2-3 weeks we can hardly imagine such situation. The animals in the barn have to be milked, cooling the milk and collecting will become a true challenge. We also need diesel for the machines, we don't have a reservoir here at the house. For us, the farm and living are closely linked. During a consultation, we were told that it is better to install a PV system and the right energy storage facilities, so that we don't need to plan for an emergency generator. The dependence on electricity makes us a lot to think about. In the future, and in case we build the PV on the barn we will be allowed to feed in 5kW, the grid is overloaded. Many of the automatic systems, such as a milking robot, cost an enormous amount, but they also do not provide the promised comfort. Whenever something is malfunctioning, the farmer gets a message on his mobile phone. No matter whether it is day or night. In addition, the service technician has to come all the time because you hardly have any influence on the process and can't repair anything yourself. We don't want to become so dependent and also pay for the services a fortune. We prefer to go to the barn and do the work ourselves. Our products are more than just a commodity, we have a relationship with our animals and we have control over our own lives and daily routines. The big farmers no longer go into the forest themselves, they organise everything with companies. Those who grow bigger and bigger become organisers, they are no longer connected with the realities of live, the forest, the livestock.

Dealing with energy is important for us, our generation has put a lot of emphasis on growth, but not everything can grow. Now everyone is thinking about saving energy, but there are many other areas that are just as important or are related to it. There is road transit with high energy costs and the impact on local businesses, the decreased income

opportunities in the countryside and – exemplary - fallen timber prices. A lot of things are incomprehensible, first the heating with pellets is promoted, then the prices for pellets increase many times. The price a year ago was 240€ per ton, now prices are almost 700€, but the pellets are sold abroad, so you don't get any.

Quotes

Actually it's incomprehensible what's happening now, with pellets the prices were 240€ per tonne, now they cost 600-700€. And at the end of the day they said they wouldn't get any more, because the pellets were being delivered abroad. They told the single-family house builders to switch to pellets, but what has happened is a nasty thing.

The positive thing about the crisis is that something is happening now. Now we're ready, but not all countries are active, that's what came out at the climate conference. It's good that research is being done again. But I get angry when people then fly to the moon. It can't be that something like that is done because other problems are much more important.

We often thought about modernisation, we planned a solar system for our house, but there were always many other important investments that took priority. Actually, our economy is quite old-fashioned and traditional. We didn't want to modernise a lot and keep depending on growth, that's a matter of attitude.

Keywords

Traditional farming; generation change in farming; non-modernisation; forced change of electricity provider; rural economy

RL3_AT09, Austria, Dependency on multiple energy sources in a village with a pub business

Narrative

My name is Christa and I live in a small town in the mid of Austria, I am 61 years old. My son is 37 and lives elsewhere with his family. I grew up in my parents' traditional village guesthouse and I already knew as a child that I would stay here. My partner also lives here; he has children who live further away but are also grown up. I was always living alone and I as a single mother it is hard to have enough income. The house we live in is

over 500 years old, but fortunately it is not a listed building. So we can change the house as we like.

I live very modestly, but I need to own a car, there is no public transport here, except for the school bus, solely available for the pupils. I have income from the restaurant business, but it fluctuates quite a lot. Renting out guest rooms is my main business, but I only have three rooms for rent; sometimes I also cook for workers who get their dinner here after their work on a construction site or the work in the forest. We have installed our central heating since 1996. We heat with logs, during night also with fuel oil.

Unfortunately, I don't have a buffer tank, there is simply no space in the house. I use bottled gas for cooking in the kitchen, that's what I'm used to. For a few years I've an additional electric stove in the kitchen, some dishes can't be prepared on the gas cooker, you need an oven and that's not available with gas, it's only possible with electricity. I like to heat with wood. I also like to do the work with the wood, that is, splitting the wood, bringing it to the stove. I buy the wood on pallets, there's about 1m³ inside. The boxes are delivered to me and I have quite a big wood storage behind the house with a roof, so the wood can dry well. We always buy the wood two years in advance, this year we are buying for the year after next. Last year I paid 90€, before it was even less, but now it costs 180€, so an increase of 100% for the hardwood. With the current price of 180€ one starts to think more about the price. Maybe we have to ask around here in the municipality, hardwood is the best as it burns longer and it burns better. Maybe the price will go down, it can't be that it remains that expensive. The salesman said no one buys wood at the moment. But he doesn't care, he stores the wood and he will sell it later. If prices remain high for this year, we won't buy any wood. Otherwise we can look for mixed wood, coniferous wood, which will hopefully still be cheap.

Of course, you also need electricity for the circulation pump when you heat with wood, the water in the central heating system must move, otherwise the stove is destroyed. My partner has installed a generator to be prepared for a possible black-out. It's in a shed, I'm not sure if I can unlock the door without electricity, I must honestly say that I haven't quite understood how to start the generator yet, it's quite complicated. Of course, I also need the generator as an electricity back-up for the summer time. The refrigeration system for the food and ice must be switched on. Our old house is not easy to insulate either, the walls are one-metre-thick and made of stone. My partner is a bricklayer, he knows a lot about old buildings, he does such renovations professionally. You can't insulate an old house so easily; you can't do airtight insulation. He has already insulated three sides of the house.

Our electricity provider can't offer electricity anymore since September and we had to change the energy provider. We need the electricity for the refrigeration, the dishwasher and so on. Different providers sent us offers, the least expensive comes from the e-provider operated by our municipality. I compared the prices carefully, it makes a difference to me. Price differences between offers were very big. I paid 5 cents, now a new contract starts with 46 cents per kWh - that's a huge difference. I'm curious what will happen with the line fees, I don't understand why the costs can rise so much when the electricity comes from hydropower anyway. This is not connected with the gas price and has no link to the war in Ukraine.

I have already thought about a PV system, the neighbour wants to "pave over" his barn with panels, he plans also a power storage unit. He needs the electricity for milking, for washing the milking equipment and for all barn chores, so it will certainly pay off. I'm

not in favour of solar power, because I think I can cover the costs of electricity for a long time until a PV installation pays off. I'm not in favour of it, also because of the disposal of the batteries, no one has any idea how to dispose them in future.

I get very annoyed when agricultural land is flooded with photovoltaic panels. In two nearby villages there are meadows that are covered with PV. If you do so on steep slopes, that's fine. On flat land you can at least mow or let an animal graze, so I find it strange when PV panels are covering productive land. Of course, using the roof or a balcony, that's fine, but to use productive agricultural land, that's wrong. Everything is becoming expensive at the moment, even the price of cylinder gas for the kitchen has increased a lot. I get the 11kg cylinders from the plumber's shop from here. But the gas already costs 42€, and in January it's going to cost even more because of a new tax. Those who can't afford energy costs any more will most likely give up their holiday trips. Holiday travels are also getting more expensive. I heard from my family that they paid an additional energy levy when they visited a thermal spa, so it will also be more expensive at the holiday resort. A few hundred metres from here is the fire station, where farmers run a small heating plant. They also heat the house next to it, 10 flats are served. It works well, but I don't know how the billing works. It's not that far away, we could actually join them heating plant, but I don't know if the plant has that much power. If there was a community initiative, that would be great, I wouldn't have to mess around with the wood, it would be easier for me. The maintenance of the chimneys also costs a lot, it's over 300€ a year, the smoke sweep comes five times annually, we have three chimneys in the house.

Quotes

If you've already been client of the municipal electricity provider Neumarkt, you'd pay 5 cents per kWh, with our new contract we'll pay 46 cents, which is a lot more. That would be unfair if the old customers of the town's utility were to keep the same tariff and we were to pay many times more - just because we were new customers.

I'm not really in favour of solar power, instead of such investment I can pay the electricity bill for a long time. I am concerned of the disposal of storage batteries, you don't know where to dispose of them, there is no available technology.

Keywords

Change of energy provider; multiple energy sources; blackout preparedness; fairness;

RL3_AT10, Austria, The almost triggered change of lifestyle



Narrative

My name is Monika and I live with my husband in a municipal town, he originates from a larger city, 30 km from here. My family comes from a nearby village; my mother still lives there. We live as a couple and I am a social worker, my husband is partly self-employed. We were searching for an affordable apartment for a long time, now we share with our neighbours a house. Our heating runs on pellets, the landlord purchased the pellets a year ago, but I am sure we will have a tremendous price increase in the future. I am experiencing a big change in the community at the moment, the issue of energy and especially the inflation with the price increase is an important topic for us. Mobility costs have also gone up, fuel has become so expensive and we have no sufficient public transport in our municipality. There are many alternative solutions that potentially can shape the future, there is also a mood for change, but the final trigger for a real change is so far absent.

People are getting tired of following all the negative news on environmental issues, the strong price increase. On TV or in the newspaper the messages are generally very negative, there is never anything positive in the media. As far as energy saving or alternatives are concerned, I think that it would be the best to use leaflets, organise events so that the information can be best put forward.

I see it in the work with the young people, they don't even switch off the light when they leave a room. But there is more to say. The older generation still remembers crisis situations, more tremendous ones as we have it at the moment. This same generation had an increasingly better and better life for a long time due to strong economic growth. They did not think about the many resources that are needed for this growth. They also paid a lot of attention to the signs of wealth, prosperity, i.e. who has the better and more powerful tractor at the farm and so on. But now we as a society are at a point where it becomes clear that a change is needed, my generation is much concerned about the development. For us as the younger generation, it is actually very difficult to achieve prosperity. The time when everyone was building a house is over now, the costs are just so high. On the positive side, all that's really missing at the moment is the final push to enter a new way of living and including the use of energy and all related topics, just the initial spark is missing. I often ask myself what it would take to become energy self-sufficient, but I'm not completely familiar with the technicalities. I think there is some chance to become energy self-sufficient, both in terms of electricity and energy for heating. We have to take our future into our own hands and as well the communities, the municipalities have to become more active. Overall, I think that people with enough knowledge are around, enough ideas are on the table. Of course, there is pressure from the ever-increasing costs, and I think that there we can bring the generations closer to each other, for example in housing. My mother lives alone and has electricity costs that are now three times higher than a year ago, so a lot of people really have problems. I know that there is a right to have an electricity basic supply, nobody can cut your house off from the grid. But you still have to pay the costs, the electricity just doesn't get switched off. What worries me is that there is a mentality of "I don't care about anything" so the momentum for change gets lost.

I think that the information overload creates blunting and makes dull. There is so much information and one can't process it anymore, so you fade out, hide the important stuff.

Me and my friends believe that regional initiatives are important, there are enough interested people that are eager to try out new approaches. For new initiatives it's not about money coming from outside of the region, there are enough resources here and also ideas, experts and everything that goes with it.

We recently had an information event where an "energy ambassador" provided insights in a sustainable energy demonstration house, he was in town. He presented a technology with hydrogen storage for self-sufficient households. Such regional demonstration houses are very important, so that we can see on our doorstep what is technically possible. It's just a bit too expensive at the moment.

Quotes

I don't think people know enough about energy saving. On television we get only negative messages; oil crisis, energy crisis, people switch off when that is on the screen. I think that the information overload creates blunting and makes dull. There is so much information and one can't process it anymore, so you fade out, hide the important stuff.

On the positive side, all that's really missing at the moment is the final push to enter a new way of living, just the initial spark is missing.

For us as the younger generation, it is actually very difficult to achieve prosperity. The time when everyone was building a house is over now, the costs are just so high.

When people have to save money for the energy bill, they save money on food. They buy the cheapest food, that's how they survive.

Keywords

Generation conflicts; information deficits; prosperity

RL3_IT01, Italy, This is the best place where a person like me could possibly live

Narrative

My name is Luigi, I am over 60 years old and I am retired. I was an inmate and lived in a psychiatric hospital, then in a shelter and finally in an independent flat. I have 2 children,

who live in another city and visit me when they have time. For many years I knew that a foundation was building these ecological houses where I live now, and that I could go there when they were ready. These houses are built of brick, with straw inside, to insulate them, and they have solar panels on the roof. There is an accumulator that stores the energy for when the sun is out. In the summer, there is a lot of energy, and a transformer sends it into the public electricity grid, while when we need energy we can take it from the same grid and so what we earn and what we spend is compensated. I've been living here for three months now and I'm very happy because the house is bigger than the one I was in before, it's more spacious, and we pay very little for electricity. We practically only pay for water and the tax for garbage. In the house where I was staying before, I went as far as paying bills of 90 and even 130 euros, whereas here, since I arrived in August and it is still quite warm, I have never had to pay for electricity. When I joined the Foundation's project years ago, before the little houses were ready, they gave me a course to be a cook and I worked in the kitchen. I also took a cook's exam. Then, after a few years, they told me about the energy community and told me that the houses were ready and that I could have one. These houses are like our own. We pay taxes but don't pay rent. They are ours for life, even if we get to live a hundred years. But when we are gone, they will become someone else's. The Foundation has other projects like this in other cities. This is a project that embraces the whole region. They go around checking that everything works and that all the people are well. So, we are not alone, because we are part of this Foundation and we are partners. As an obligation, for me, who no longer works, I only have to do my own shopping, make my own food and keep the house clean and tidy. We are free people, and we could also marry and bring another person to live here, for example, if we wanted to. Then they help us if we have any problems. I, for example, once broke my mobile phone and had to buy a new one. I spent 200 euros, so I asked if they could lend me 50 euros. They gave it to me and said they wouldn't take it back, and to let them know if I needed money from time to time. There cannot be a better place for me to live than here. With my social pension of EUR 650 a month I could not pay rent, pay the bills, maintain the car and feed myself. But I can now because I don't pay rent or electricity. So, I have about 100 euros a month left in my pocket and I can do some small expenses for myself.

Quotes

They told me I would be living there, but it took almost ten years in the end. I said, 'Let's hope I'm still alive by then! If I am still here, I would certainly be very glad.'

Where could a person like me possibly live better?

Keywords

Mental disability, inmates, ecological homes, electricity bills, photovoltaic system

RL3_IT02, Italy, Armanda feels more financially secure now, and thinks everybody should use solar panels

Narrative

My name is Armanda and I am 59 years old. In the past I had a moment of depression, which I am now trying to overcome, and in general, I have had a troubled life. I don't want to talk about it, because every time my voice shakes and I'm afraid to start crying, but I have had my own problems in life and that is why I came into contact with the social cooperative system, which helped me find work as a seamstress. I have been doing this job for many years now. Then they included me in the project of these ecological houses where I live now. Now I have my own house and I am very comfortable. We use solar panels, and this is the first experience for me, because before I had to pay the bills, whereas now I can save something. I have been living here for three months, together with other people. But each of us has our own little house. When I lived in a rented house I paid very high bills, up to 170 or 200 euros, whereas here the expenses are very low, so I can manage expenses on my own, which is a very positive thing for me. Before, I had to make sacrifices if I wanted to pay for electricity, water, gas, all these things, and then also the rent. These are ecological houses and this is also a special experience for me. The house where I live is nice, because it is well insulated and so it is cool in summer and keeps the heat in winter, and this is because of the straw that is put inside the walls. This is the first time I've seen something like this in my life. I don't think anyone else in the city has a house like this. When they first told me how the houses were built, I laughed. "What, are they made of straw?" Then, when I realised what that meant, I saw that it was a very good thing and that it makes me live much more financially serene. I have never been interested in these things, so this is the first time I have thought about it. I had never heard of such possibilities, and I didn't even know what these solar panels were. But now I think everyone should use them, to save money, since bills are rising so much for everyone. Solar panels should be put in all houses, and for those who don't have roofs, they should be put on balconies. Now thanks to living in this energy community I am overcoming my difficulties and I feel good. Let's say, not exactly one hundred per cent, but all the help they gave me was really a very good thing. They did something right and by bringing us to live here they also made us feel more 'social' and less isolated, which I really needed. There are also psychologists here, who have helped me a lot.

Quotes

I don't know for sure how these solar panels work, but they are certainly a big asset to me.



It is a system that is very good for people like us, for those who work little and have a chance to be well anyway.

They have done something really right here.

Keywords

Mental disability, ecological homes, electricity bills, photovoltaic system, Autonomy

RL3_IT03, Italy, Assunta enjoys the social bonds created around a solidarity community scheme

Narrative

My name is Assunta and I am 42 years old. I am married and have a little girl who will be four years old in a few days. I have always worked in tourism, doing various things, mainly in the hotel industry. At some point, however, after a 20-year stint, I decided to quit my job in 2014, to set up my own business, which was my dream, and opened a bed and breakfast. In 2018, I met the man who would become my husband and, after a lifetime of considered choices, I had a stroke of madness and after three months I was pregnant with my daughter. So, along with the baby bump, my relationship with my husband also grew and my life changed. I had to reorganise my whole life, change my house, because mine was too small, and change everything. On this path of uncalculated motherhood, in February 2020, amid the COVID pandemic, I discovered through my paediatrician the existence of a centre that promoted workshops for mothers, and I enrolled. It was a centre organised as part of a solidarity energy community, which also offered educational services to people in the neighbourhood, parents and children, even if they did not participate in the energy community. So I started attending this centre, and it was a very strong experience for me, because I was in the first year of motherhood, which is always complicated, because there was the pandemic, and also because my life changed completely in a few years, also considering that I had just changed job. The centre for me, also thanks to the two coordinators who are fantastic people, eventually became like a second home, where we had coffee with the other mothers, played together with the children and did cleaning and maintenance work together, because we felt it was our place. The rule at the centre is that you cannot leave the youngest children and go away because the centre provides support and educational activities for parents and children

together. That is why some cannot participate, for work reasons, or even just because they do not see the point. Instead, if you participate you realise the added value of this community and the activities it offers, from theatre workshops to the simple possibility of playing with your children, but together with others, in a different way than you would at home. About twelve children attend the centre permanently, and others do so more occasionally.

Different people come to the centre. The energy community was built in a neighbourhood where there used to be a slum, and precisely to support the poorer people who lived there. So there are people who suffer more from poverty or hardship and, quote-unquote, normal people, although I don't like that word, or who come from other neighbourhoods. In my opinion, the discourse of having a mixed environment is a winning one. It allows you a mutual exchange because everyone has something to give you and you have something to give to others. So the fact of coming from different backgrounds helps. For example, we did a theatre workshop with five other mothers and it was an important experience precisely in terms of emotions, telling each other about one's past and so on. People from different backgrounds, who don't usually hang out together, who didn't know each other before, but between whom intimacy was born precisely because they were together in such an initiative. Even though my daughter is now grown up and goes to nursery school, we always try to carve out time in the afternoons, and she is very happy to come and have a snack here with the other children because it's like a piece of our home and our family. The dads also come, but less than the mums. Currently, as far as I can see, there are three really active ones. The centre is becoming better known in the neighbourhood. When I started coming here it was much less so, although it was known in the circuit of paediatricians and school teachers. I had mentioned it to my daughter's kindergarten teacher and she knew it. But among people much less. I myself did a lot of publicity for it by talking about it to all the people I knew and giving the number to those who had children. Now, however, I see that it is much better known in the neighbourhood and outside. The fact that the centre is within an energy community, with solar panels on the roof and energy autonomy was explained to us, and it gave me the idea to do the same at home. Luckily we are not having too many problems with energy costs, neither at home nor for the bed and breakfast. The credit goes to my husband, who is really a hound for the best rates and advantageous contract changes. In addition, my facility has several energy-saving devices, such as the card key, which must be inserted to get the light. My colleagues who don't have this system waste a lot of energy and are now suffering much more than me from high bills. Even at home, we have a domotics system so we save a lot of energy. I also care a lot about environmental aspects outside of work. I always walk whenever possible and I inherited this attitude from my grandmother, who even though she lived in a time when there was no awareness of the environment, had the art of recycling, of recycling things and always giving them a new life. I too do this in my daily life whenever I can. I also try to pass this attitude on to my daughter, which is why I am very happy that the centre is part of the energy community and that the children can see from an early age that this is a beautiful and normal thing.

Quotes



During Covid, the educational service offered by the energy community to parents was like a ray of sunshine.

After my experience of working in a hotel, I used to say, 'look, people are not paying attention to energy consumption'.

I strongly wanted measures to reduce electricity consumption, also of guests, in my bed and breakfast.

Keywords

Children, parents, environmental education, Covid, energy-saving measures, solidarity energy communities, exchange, motherhood

RL3_IT04, Italy, Salvatore is moving into the solidarity energy community he works in

Narrative

My name is Salvatore and I just turned 60. I am married, have 2 children and 3 grandchildren. I used to work in a community for drug addicts as a therapeutic community worker. Then I had the opportunity to join the consortium that now runs this energy community as an employee. I started as a custodian because at that time construction work was being completed and that was what was needed. Then let's say I was fascinated by the idea of renewable energy, photovoltaics and solar thermal, and also the way the houses were built, with the insulation system, rainwater collection, and battery storage. I am happy that they offered me the opportunity to come and live in one of these modules. Now I am the chief worker here and I am in charge of maintenance. I will continue to do this when I move to live here soon. I will only come with my wife because my children are grown up and live on their own. Maintenance is important because the houses are partly masonry, especially the kitchen and bathroom, and partly wood. The supporting beams inside are made of wood, for example, and wood is a material that always needs to be checked and maintained. When I move in, I will work together with some guests who are already working with me on maintenance. I know them all well, and some for a very long time, even before they came to live here. So, it's not just about work, but also friendship. I think that harnessing solar energy, at this moment, but also before, is a necessary thing. I think it should be done everywhere, but especially in this region, where we have this fantastic climate. These modules also have a storage system, so the extra energy produced during the day can be used during the night. In addition, there is

solar thermal for hot water. Each module has a 140/160 litre tank that heats up without the need for electricity and grid consumption. In winter, it does not get very hot, but maybe 35/36 degrees, with which you can still take a shower very well. This also saves on water, which otherwise needs either gas or electricity from the mains. In any case, each module also has a water heater and an air conditioner, which can be switched on at any time, so there is no risk of being left in the cold or without hot water. But until now there has never been any need for this because the houses have an optimal microclimate, precisely because of the way the structure is built. It is comfortable both in summer and winter. So, coming to live here will be an advantage for me and my wife, in terms of costs. I hope everything goes well. Of course, I have a very close relationship with the guests, so I have a little doubt that they might come looking for me outside working hours, and maybe even at night. I'm not saying that this is a negative element. I say it with a smile, but you have to understand how it will work, establish some rules. But maybe this is just a concern of mine and everything will be fine. But in fact, change frightens me a little. Partly for emotional reasons, because I live now close to my sister, my daughter and my three grandchildren. Then there is the neighbourhood, the 'good morning' and 'good evening' with the neighbours, and the 'how are you? What are you eating today?' and all the classic affectionate things we have here in the South. When we come to live in the community everything will change. I will spend most of my working hours here, and this will be different from how it is now. There are many advantages, like the savings on bills, the fact that the house where we live now would still need a lot of work. But the furniture has to be bought new and a lot of it has to be custom-made, just because of the characteristics of the house. The roofs, for example, are slightly lower. Then, precisely because there is photovoltaics, the hob will be induction and not gas, and we will have to get used to it. My wife, however, is convinced. It will be a big change for us.

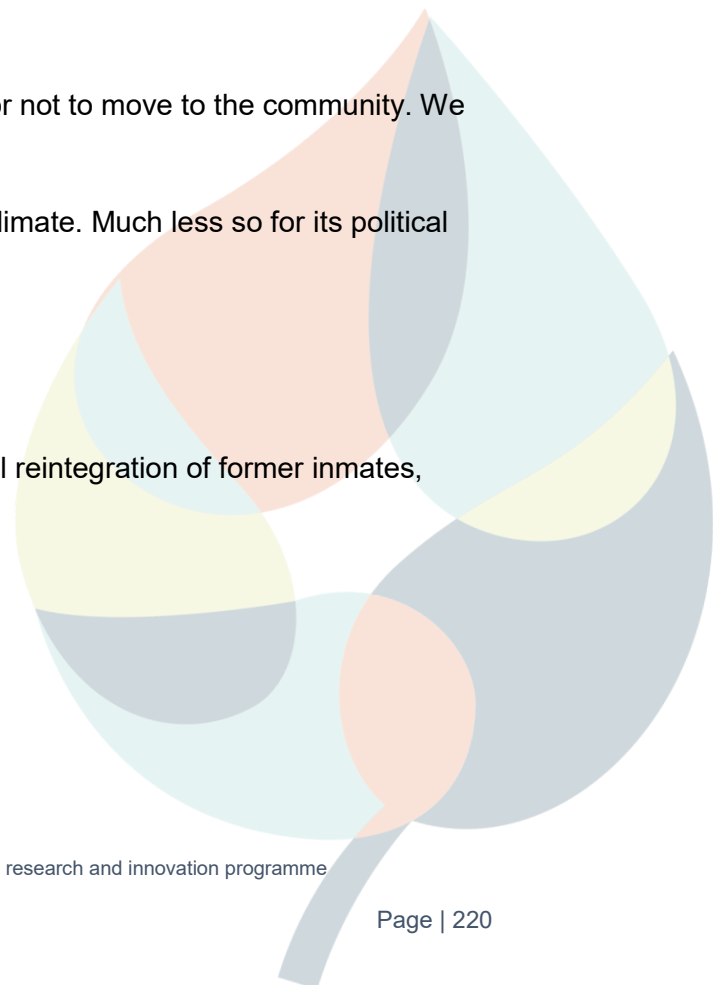
Quotes

We discussed with my wife for a long time whether or not to move to the community. We had to weigh many things in the balance.

Our region is great for photovoltaics because of its climate. Much less so for its political leaders.

Keywords

Photovoltaic, solar thermal, ecological houses, social reintegration of former inmates, social reintegration of psychiatric patients



RL3_IT05, Italy, Rosa would like solidarity energy communities to spread

Narrative

My name is Rosa, I am 38 years old and I am expecting a baby. I am an educator and work with the foundation promoting a solidarity energy community. For about three years now, I have taken on the role of coordinator of an educational service for children from zero to three years old offered to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood (and beyond), whether they are part of the community or not. The service is located in one of the community's eco-friendly houses and has photovoltaic panels on the roof. Next door there is a similar service offered, again free of charge, to children aged three and up. The houses were built where there used to be a shantytown, and the educational services, such as the energy community, were aimed precisely at the inhabitants of this shantytown. A special feature of the service is that, for children up to the age of three, a reference figure for the child, be it a parent, a grandparent, or even a babysitter, must stay with the children, they cannot leave them and go away. Although I have worked in many other services, this was the first time I found myself working with parents. I thought they might be an obstacle, instead, it was the thing that made the difference, because a wonderful relationship was created, not only between the educators and the parents but among the parents themselves. This is also because they come from completely different socio-cultural situations and put their skills at the service of others. Perhaps a mother is a hairdresser and cuts the hair of a child whose family cannot afford to take him to the hairdresser often enough, or a mother knows how to make cakes and brings them to every birthday. Dads also attend and feel comfortable. They make coffee, arrange the toys or pick up a storybook and read to the children. A beautiful environment and atmosphere have been created. We have also managed to network with other realities in the area, such as a language school nearby, so foreign mothers can have Italian lessons while they are here with their children. When we opened the service, the users were mainly people living in shacks. In the beginning, it was difficult to make the parents understand that they had to stay. Children, even very young ones, would go out into the street to play, even on their own, perhaps in their pyjamas. As their houses were very small, the street was an extension of their home. So they would be attracted by our big windows and see the games inside. They wanted to come inside and at first, it was hard to say no. We would tell them 'call mummy and come back with her'. But the mothers might want to use the time without the children to do the chores, to cook, they would say, "why do we have to stay here?" Then slowly we managed to get them into this mindset and a beautiful relationship was created. At first, I also did visiting work, going to the homes of mothers who had recently given birth in the most at-risk areas and bringing them into our service. Now the mothers stay because they really like it, they get to know each other, they chat, and it's a way of not bringing up their children alone at home, but of having people to talk to and exchange experiences with. This was precisely our goal, especially for the most disadvantaged families. Many of these parents we have lost now, because as the shantytown was being dismantled they moved to houses that were given

to them in other neighbourhoods. But they come back to visit us on special occasions or when we organise events because there was a very close relationship. I also worked as a mediator between the families and the broader energy community project, and just in the last few months, before I went on maternity leave, I was taking a course to also learn how to manage the more technical side of the energy part of the project so that I could explain it to the families. We also started to support them in aspects like energy bills, air quality in their homes, etc. This is because the service we have has become a bit of a reference point for these families, many of whom are foreigners, to solve practical problems they can't manage by themselves. Our intention is to continue to follow those at risk of energy poverty and that is why I was taking the course and will resume it after maternity leave.

Many do not really have the tools to deal with these issues, neither financially nor in terms of knowledge (how to make contracts, pay bills, etc.). When we welcome parents for the first time at the service, we explain that there are solar panels on the roof, that we are part of an energy community and that the energy produced is distributed fairly among the community members. What we would like to do in the near future, however, are educational projects on environmental issues and photovoltaic energy aimed at school children. This, however, will involve older children and primary and secondary schools in particular. I think there should be more energy communities like this, especially because of the principle of fair distribution between those who can perhaps pay a bill and those who cannot. Now, this is a very important concept. It would be nice if we could expand the energy community even more, which we want to do, in the neighbourhood.

Quotes

A relationship of trust must be created with households at risk of energy poverty to bring them closer to the energy community.

We now want to teach the concept of energy saving to children through play.

Keywords

Children, education, schools, at-risk families, energy communities

RL3_IT06, Italy, Guglielmo sets up a photovoltaic system that still does not work

Narrative



I am Guglielmo, I am 72 years old. I am a widower and retired. I am also a farmer and, up until a year ago, I had a piece of land. I have always been very respectful of the environment and I have never used fertilisers because I have always opted only for organic products.

I currently collaborate on a voluntary basis with the municipal administration. For many years, I had a pomace boiler for heating my house, which was highly environmentally polluting. To pollute less, 7 years ago I replaced the pomace boiler with a gas boiler, which is a more environmentally friendly fuel. Then, three years ago, I installed the solar thermal system. I spent 400 euro, but achieved a reduction in gas consumption of 10%-15%. The first step - from pomace to gas - led to a decrease in expenditure from 900/1000 euro to about 700 euro. With the switch to solar thermal, the expenditure was reduced to around 500 euro. At the same time, I achieved a big reduction in the impact on the environment. At the beginning of 2022, I needed to replace the air conditioners that no longer worked and at this point it was suggested to me to install photovoltaics. I installed photovoltaics in my house, benefiting from the 110% cost-reduction legislation and therefore, in fact, had to spend almost nothing (I only paid those who took care of the procedure and some costs of the operator - in relation to the increase in power and other such things). This was possible because my house meets all the requirements for this benefit. The aim was to stop using gas by storing solar energy during the day, except in exceptional cases. This was proceeding smoothly and, therefore, the system was built on schedule in 4 months. The system has been ready since the end of June, but could not be put into operation because it has not yet been connected to the grid. There were months of sunshine when I could have used the photovoltaic system and instead nothing was done. Why not take action to avoid this waste? Money is wasted and the environment is not respected. All this because, for months, the operator has still not come to connect the wires, which is an operation that takes no more than two hours. Therefore, I continue to pay for electricity in full as if photovoltaics did not exist. Fortunately, always at the same price, since I have a contract that guaranteed it. Therefore, I have not suffered any price increases. There are neighbours, however, who have had the cost of energy more than double. However, I too run the risk of having to pay 300 or 400 euro in the coming months. If photovoltaics came on stream, I would spend much less. In some circumstances, I would also be an energy producer able to feed electricity into the grid. For now, however, none of this. And there is no telling when the situation will be resolved ... although in the meantime I have paid all the administrative fees that had to be paid. One of my friends waited a year and two months. This delay is said to be due to a shortage of personnel. The installation of the photovoltaic system in my home is independent of the creation of the energy and solidarity community, but it was carried out as part of the same policy, which has been the responsibility of this municipal administration since 2015, to promote and disseminate renewable energy. Obviously, when it is possible, I will join the Energy and Solidarity Community, but this is currently impossible as we depend on two different primary substations and current legislation does not allow it. In fact, the associates of the Energy Community are only the municipality and people (two shops and two families) who are located very close to the municipality's headquarters. In my same situation there are several other people: they have a photovoltaic system, but they depend on different cabins from the municipality. However, I believe that these are issues that can be overcome little by little and that we can all become part of the Energy Community. I am aware of this important initiative of the

municipality, which started with the installation of photovoltaic panels on the roof of the building where it is located. There is a strong awareness of the issue in the village. Almost everyone is aware of the existence of the Energy and Solidarity Community. Moreover, there are many citizens who have already installed photovoltaic systems and even more who have solar thermal. Just fly over the town with a drone to realise this. It will now be very important to spread the word about the savings that can be achieved, for even greater dissemination. Saving on energy is very important because there are situations of energy poverty or difficulties in paying bills, especially after the latest price increases. These are mainly commercial e-services and large families. Some acquaintances of mine have had very high energy bills. From 150 to 350/400 euro, or from 100 to 250 euro. The cost of the gas cylinder has also risen considerably. There is a risk that in January/February there will be bills of 500 euro or even 800 euro for gas or electricity that these people will not be able to pay. Some have an income that allows them to pay, but others do not. However, these are always people who have done nothing to adopt renewable energy (e.g. solar thermal or photovoltaic). Furthermore, we must remember that this is also a rural municipality, where there are people who consume pomace or firewood for heating. But they are few.

Quotes

So much publicity is given to photovoltaics and then it takes a year to connect it to the grid!

I can decrease my energy consumption by 50%-60% and this is not happening because of a bureaucratic delay.

Keywords

Photovoltaic, energy community, waste of energy, energy poverty, bureaucracy

RL3_IT07, Italy, The microenterprise of Giovanna could be saved by the Energy Community

Narrative



I am Giovanna and I am thirtysomething years old. With my brother and my mother, I am managing this shop, which is the oldest and one of the largest grocery stores in the village. It has been in my family for four generations. We hope to make it to the fifth and sixth generations as well. Those were difficult times even when my grandfather started out in the 1950s, but at that time the perspective was growth. Now, instead, the perspective is decline. I hope that we can come out of that. Counting our employees, there are seven of us running this shop. We are, therefore, a micro-enterprise and we are a member of the energy and solidarity community that was created by the Municipality. I also live nearby and this has given me the opportunity to be associated with the energy and solidarity community on an individual basis too. In this store, we have refrigerators and freezers that should be always on and this involves considerable consumption of electricity, particularly during the summer. Even before the price hikes of recent months, the cost of energy was substantial. When we received the proposal from the Municipality, we, therefore, joined the energy and solidarity community with great interest. Now we could say that energy costs have quadrupled. In truth, this is not our case, as we have reduced consumption, both by always keeping some freezers off and by paying attention to everything and eliminating, as far as possible, all forms of waste. Energy consumption that used to be part of the routine has become a permanent concern. Therefore, the cost of energy is tripled and not quadrupled (from 600-700 Euro to 1800-2000 Euro per bill). In this context, our adhesion to the community is even more important. We have already seen a reduction of around of 20% in the cost of energy bills. It is limited, for the time being, but the community has just started). This decrease is destined to increase since the energy community should involve additional plants. This is what we hope. I experienced a reduction in the energy bill also at the individual level, but this is less relevant: the real problem is with the store. It should also be emphasised that the municipal administration took care of everything, including all the bureaucratic aspects. Everything was taken care of by the municipal administration and the technicians who took care of the establishment of the community. We did nothing. We had just to sign the Statute. Thanks to the energy community, we get part of the energy we need (the “surplus energy”). For the rest, we continue to use the energy supplied by our operator. As I said, we are the main and the oldest grocery store here, but due to these enormous price increases, we risk entering a crisis, also because the prices of a large number of goods that we offer for sale have increased. In some cases (oil, pasta...) they increased a lot. But I would say that, in general, the increases affected all products, even in other departments such as haberdashery and homewares. This affects our customers, as we have been forced to raise prices, and decreased sales. Not so much, in our case, since our clients need what we sell. However, I cannot stand at the counter and not identify with a mother and notice how much she is forced to spend just buying very few products. In addition, some of our wholesale historical suppliers went bankrupt or closed down, and we had to partially restructure our purchasing network, seeking new suppliers, looking for lower prices. It should be noted that we have very few products that come from the local market: some dairy products come from a farm close by. Most of the products come from large-scale distribution. For some months now, we have been living through a very difficult period. For the moment, we are “holding up”, but it is not certain that we will make it for much longer. For the time being, we have only had to make some sacrifices, mainly on the individual and family levels (e.g. our own salary), the priority being the payment of the energy bill, as without electricity it is impossible to go on. We still have all our employees with us. We are

like family and we want to continue to stay that way. However, it could be that we will be forced to decrease our staff. That is, fire someone. It would be very painful. We are not yet at these levels, but the situation has certainly changed for the worse. In the meantime, we had to cut some products, those that were no longer performing. We have narrowed down to those that are the most efficient and viable. Thanks to the energy community, we hope to get out, at least in part, of the present situation, to have some help. It could make a difference. We still hold on.

Quotes

We were very happy to take advantage of the opportunity to join the energy community, not only for economic reasons but also to help protect the environment.

This had never happened to us before but now when some product is not working enough, we are forced to eliminate it.

Keywords

Decline, energy and solidarity community, energy costs, energy bill, holding-up

RL3_IT08, Italy, Loredana can't wait to join the energy community

Narrative

I am Loredana, I am 57 years old. I am a homemaker. I do not have a professional occupation, but I am very involved in voluntary work, particularly for the protection of the environment. My association is involved in "creative recycling". We go around schools to try to make children aware of recycling and using as few polluting products, such as plastic, as possible. We try to convey a 'pro-environment' message while at the same time entertaining the children. We do workshops with them and try to convey our message. As an example, in a neighbouring municipality we involved over 200 children with whom we held 'creative workshops' every week, also addressing the energy issue. We also make clothes out of the recycled material we collect, which we then sell and, with the income, we do social work. We are quite good and we were even invited last year to an international fashion parade in Spain. We also collect old clothes and distribute them to whoever needs them not only in the village, but also in a city nearby. We promote re-use,

even of pushchairs. Waste is enormous, particularly on clothes. We enjoy good cooperation from the citizens. For the time being, I have ordinary access to the electricity service through a national operator, but it is my intention to install solar panels. Unfortunately, in the block of flats where I live, it is a bit complicated as those who live upstairs are against it and, therefore, nothing has been done so far. Furthermore, my husband is insensitive to these kinds of issues and not very active. I am not saying he is against it, but he is not helping me. My husband is a quiet person who avoids facing anything new unless it is indispensable, maybe out of laziness. He is also afraid of having problems with the neighbours and wants to avoid any potential trouble. Fortunately, my children are like me. I hope that these problems will soon be resolved and that I will therefore be able to proceed with installing the panels, also because the building where I live is not far from the Town Hall where the municipality's solar panels are installed, so I should then become a member of the Energy and Solidarity Community. This is something I care a lot about, as I am an activist working for the protection of the environment, as I have already said. When I hear talk of digging cesspools I get really anxious. I am really distressed about how we are ruining the environment and, also for this reason, I hope to be able to join this community. I have heard a lot about this Energy and Solidarity Community. I am aware of how it came about, how some users, including stores, who are in the vicinity of the City Hall were able to join, etc. I know that something was blocked and it was not possible to go much further. There is, among other things, the problem of having people in the same Energy Community who depend on different 'primary stations' for energy distribution. I hope this problem gets resolved soon. I think many people will join the community in the future.

I am very ready to join. I would have done this before if that was possible. So far, I have not suffered the effects of the enormous increase in the cost of energy, as I have a very low income and, therefore, I benefit from some discounts. Even now, I pay a little less than before. From joining the energy community, therefore, I would have minimal economic benefits. I am interested in it for eco-environmental reasons; something I care a lot about and which, in my opinion, 30%-40% of the population here care about, just as many people approve of separate waste collection. We are at a rate of 70% and have a municipal eco-station. Separate waste collection is incentivised by benefits on municipal taxes. Some of the items that are taken to the eco-station are then given to my recycling association (pushchairs, cribs, etc.).

Instead, I hear of people paying a lot, much more than before. People with higher incomes here certainly have to cope with the rising cost of energy. I know of many people who have this problem. However, I also know of many people who, like me, do not have it because they have very low incomes. Sometimes their incomes are so low because they have undeclared jobs and incomes. This is common in small municipalities like this one. Many women work like this. Me too, I had an undeclared job in the past. I was a carer and received miserable pay. Employers do not want to regularise you. The mayor's work on environmental issues has been very important here and today many citizens are sensitive to this. Not all, but many are, perhaps also for economic reasons. My expectations for the future here are positive, also thanks to those who guide us. It is also a personal battle for him. This is a happy island. With my Association, I go around and everyone envies us for how well things work here. Not only for the environmental issues, but for the municipal administration in general. As long as this mayor is there, we are happy. He has had no

competitors so far (for his second and third terms). As for expectations for the rest of the world, forget it.

Quotes

Many look at the economic benefits. I have another point of view and I am interested in the Energy Community because I believe in it. It should be something that comes naturally.

I try to live in an environmentally sustainable way in every possible way.

Keywords

Energy and Solidarity Community, creative recycling, eco-environmental motivations, eco-station, solar panels

RL3_IT09, Italy, Giuliana suffered a scam but still wants to install solar panels and join the community

Narrative

I am Giuliana. I am 60 years old. I am married and I have two sons. I am a teacher.

I would like to join the Energy and Solidarity Community as soon as possible, but I know perfectly well that today my conditions do not allow it, also because I live quite far from the City Hall. I am well informed about its characteristics and about who can join. I am among those on a waiting list. I had asked to take advantage of the cost reduction legislation supporting the installation of solar panels. I applied correctly and, as far as I understood, my request was accepted. After that, nothing happened. I waited and then finally, after multiple requests, I learned that my request was not being followed up on. The reason is that the company that should have taken care of it did not have the capacity to carry out the expected work. In fact, they had accepted a number of requests well above their actual capabilities and, therefore, have implemented only a small part of them. In fact, I suffered a kind of scam. In this municipality, as far as I know, the company accepted 40 orders, but then only managed to realise three of them. The others suffered the same destiny as me, with a lot of effort to contact an attorney, I have at least obtained the repayment of the sum that I had to pay to present my request. Let's say they managed

to fool me, but at least I recovered the out-of-pocket costs incurred. Now, the incentives are no longer applicable in my situation and, therefore, this opportunity is lost. However, I maintain my intention to install solar panels and am looking for other opportunities to move forward. I also considered going private, but the costs are too high. Therefore, I am in a stand-by situation. As far as I know, there should be further opportunities in the future to receive contributions for the installation of photovoltaics. In any case, I will certainly proceed in this direction sooner or later. for both economic and eco-environmental purposes. Purposes that many of us have but, unfortunately, the costs to be incurred are sometimes a great obstacle. I must add that my transition to my current energy operator took place in order to be able to use the incentivising regulation. They had offered me very convenient tariffs, but then, in recent months, the cost of electricity has doubled. I used to pay 160 euros every two months, now I pay them monthly. The same happened with regard to the cost of gas. All this affects my family budget very heavily. I am a salaried employee (public employee) and my salary has had, in the same time period, an infinitesimal increase. I am single-income and have two children at university. Therefore, I have to control my expenses to the penny. At the moment, I am still able to meet my expenses, foregoing, of course, anything else, i.e. non-essential things, or perhaps going for a pizza instead of going to a restaurant. Clearly, if I could have installed solar panels and had them functioning, not only would I not have suffered an increase in the cost of energy, but vice versa, costs would have decreased, also because a more favourable parameter in relation to energy efficiency would have been applied. It was, in fact, envisaged the so-called 'coat' that would have reduced heat loss inside the house to zero; and, in addition, heat pumps that would have led to a sharp reduction in gas use.

There are people here who may be in a state of energy poverty. I have some difficulties myself, who, all in all, enjoy a decent salary; but there are people here who live off farming or are mostly seasonal labourers.

The current municipal administration has been very important here and today many citizens are sensitive to environmental issues. Just think of the differentiated waste collection. The municipality is far ahead of other villages and towns. We have moved from 'wild waste' to sorting all kinds of waste. There is also special care for the outdoor environment, with bins also installed on the streets for waste separation. Even the least attentive person is still encouraged. However, attitudes towards the energy community are not unanimous. There is some resistance. It's not all idyll. I hope that great attention will be paid to the environment in the future. Nature demands it from various sides. Just think of the rain in recent days. The damage this time was very limited. Other times it has been worse. Very serious damage, which, however, we managed to cope with. This is also a municipality at seismic risk, even if this has little to do with environmental protection. Anyway, much has also been done for earthquake-proofing.

Quotes

The energy community is something that will surely lead us towards positive solutions in terms of money-saving and environmental friendliness.

One should always start with those who have less in order to give them more.

The work done over the years has produced excellent results. The municipal administration did a lot.

Keywords

Energy and Solidarity Community, solar panels, scam, energy efficiency, energy poverty, waste separation

RL3_IT10, Italy, For Claudia, the energy community should be like one big family

Narrative

I am Claudia. I am 62 years old. I am married and I have a son. I am a homemaker. I do not have a professional occupation, but I help my nephews who have a farm and produce oil. Moreover, I am very involved in voluntary work to protect the environment through an association engaged in “creative recycling”. We are three women working in this association. This association was born when the Municipality started to promote separate waste collection. We have been trying to give our contribution for eight years with environmental awareness activities and recycling of clothes and useful objects that people throw away and which, instead, can somehow be recycled.

For 12 years, we have had a photovoltaic system installed on the roof of my house. A small system, as the house is small. My daughter, my son and I installed it. We did it for economic reasons, but mainly because we are all people who, living in the countryside, have the utmost respect for the environment. We are three families living in three separate apartments but within the same building. Before installing photovoltaics, we had ordinary electricity contracts. We also have a chimney. For the photovoltaic installation, we benefited from state subsidies or tax incentives; I don't remember ... my husband took care of that. Anyway, it was a lot of money, but we only covered part of the cost and we had to take out a mortgage to pay, the three families together. From then on, the bills were not high. There were also contributions from the electricity service operator that helped us pay the mortgage. The mortgage has been paid in full and so, from now on, the contributions from the electricity service operator are 'income'. Of course, we have to pay the energy bills, which have been low for a long time, but recently, even for us, they have increased, but not so much. Affordable amounts. We are happy. The contributions from the service operator come as we feed electricity into the grid thanks to the photovoltaic system. However, we have some problems with maintenance. Pigeons have made the photovoltaic system their home; so we have to go on the roof to clean, move tiles ... We have certainly not regretted our choice, but it is something annoying. Anyway,

the system has always worked. I must emphasise that we are also people who are very careful about consumption, about avoiding all forms of waste. We have always been like that. We never turn on the lights unnecessarily. These are behaviours that we are already passing on to our grandchildren. There has been no change in behaviour as a result of the increase in the cost of electricity I am informed about the energy community. I read something. I also saw the request to join. But then I learned that everything had stalled and that we have to wait. I intend to join as soon as possible. Currently, we cannot. It is a question of power substations. I also believe that the community should be something that serves the whole municipality. Everything is being done to be a big family, all together. I am not aware of people having difficulty paying their energy bills here, also because these are not issues that are talked about much. However, I do know of people who have had cost increases from 150 euros to 370 euros. So many families have this problem. This is a village where much is already being done. But even more could be done to fight pollution and also in relation to waste so that we can all have a better life.

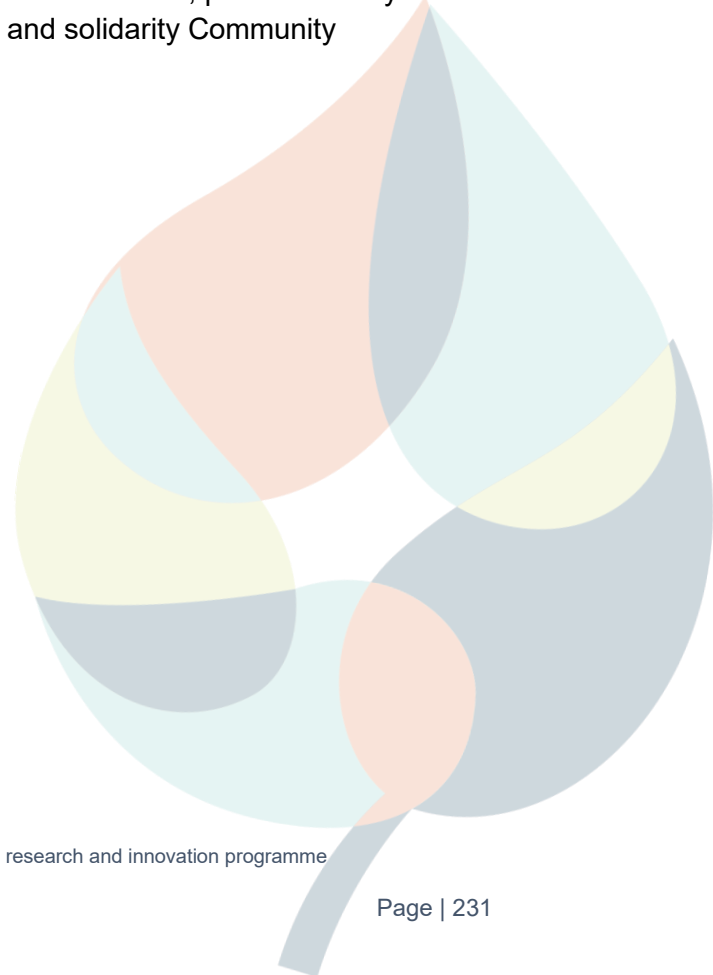
Quotes

The economic side is always there. But we really wanted the photovoltaic system because we are environmentally friendly.

My wish is that we try to pollute less and less. This is my wish for the future.

Keywords

Volunteerism, separate waste collection, environmental awareness, photovoltaic system maintenance, feeding electricity into the grid, energy and solidarity Community



Research Line 4: Intensifying the adoption of EEMs in micro/smaller SMEs

RL4_IT01, Italy, Francesca will adopt EEMs considering the huge increase of the energy cost

Narrative

My name is Francesca, and I am a woman entrepreneur forty-something years old leading a small enterprise in an industrial area in the north of Italy working in the textile sector and more specifically in the commercialisation of work clothing and cleaning materials. We have seven employees (of which five are women) plus three managers and a dozen of agents external to the enterprise that support our marketing activities (they are not employees, but freelancers), some working in other regions as well. I am a mother of two children that are one at primary school, and the other at middle school. Our premises are a three-level building and a warehouse of 1,500 square meters. We have no production lines and therefore we have no machinery.

“Therefore, in terms of energy, we are not an energy-intensive enterprise”. We use energy for light, air conditioning in summer and gas heating in winter. I have always relied on consultants of a good level and we have always succeeded, in the past, to get fixed-price contracts, both for electricity and for gas. At the beginning of this year, we kept fixed-price contracts, which were quite advantageous (given the context), despite a significant increase in costs. During the year (July), however, we transformed from a sole proprietorship into a limited liability company and, unfortunately, it was not possible to keep this type of contract (fixed-price) so I had to adapt to variable prices, with considerable cost increase (100% to 180% comparing the present cost with the cost six months or one year ago). For the time being, we have not adopted specific measures to deal with this situation, limiting ourselves to pay more attention to lower consumption and avoid waste (e.g., turn off the light, turn off the air conditioning when a room is empty). We will also try to delay the ignition of the heating as much as possible. Since we commercialise work clothes, I must point out that from several companies we have been increasingly requested thermal sweaters as well as fleece and sweatshirts and, also in our enterprise, we will use them to limit the use of heating. In past years, this kind of work

clothes were used only in warehouses (which, although heated, are never a warm environment). Now, many enterprises ask for this type of clothing also to give it to the people who work in the offices, to reduce the use of heating.

For our company, the cost increase was (approximately) from 2,000 Euro to 5,000 Euro (it is a lot but we can afford it), while friends of other companies which are much more dependent on energy are in serious difficulty (increases of millions of euros). These friends of mine, who have much more accurate energy practices (and have specific energy budgets), think that, at the end of the year, they will be forced to dismiss production lines. In some cases, they even think to close their business with all the consequences that this entails (e.g., putting employees on layoffs and not only). “It’s never nice to close a business”.

All this is currently leading me, also for my company, to seek information in order to be able to take more important measures. I am working to install the solar panels (looking at prices and feasibility). Moreover, this week, I started researching tenders to try to get financial contributions to cope with the rise in energy prices. I have not found them yet, but I know they are there. I learned of a contribution (or better, of a tax exemption) that previously concerned only energy-intensive enterprises, which now would also have been extended to small entrepreneurs. “Until now, I have never used any type of tax advantage”.

Presently, I am trying to become more aware than in the past. “I had never done this before. I limited myself to looking for the best rates and raising awareness among employees to avoid waste, but I did it, mostly, out of a sense of responsibility, as I already did in my family. My behaviour was dictated by ethical and environmental principles that I had and I tried to pass on to others. And I was regarded as a fussy person”. Now, however, the economic problem is perceived and, even my employees, having experienced first-hand the increase in energy costs that they have had at home, have all become aware and have changed their attitude. The feedback, lately, is positive. Even in my family I have addressed this issue with my daughters (although children are less sensitive to these topics) trying to explain to them how this affects our family and other families and what all this can entail. “These are ethical principles that are very important to me and are now becoming even more concrete”. “Speaking with fellow entrepreneurs, and also with friends about the family aspect, I notice that there is a lot of awareness. I have friends who, simply, were in shorts and t-shirts on December 31st or February 8th with freezing cold outside and with a heating up to the nth degree in the house, to get to almost skip the shower today, even people who would have no problem supporting double or triple the expense”. However, it is above all the micro and small entrepreneurs who meet serious problems to pay energy and many are not paying it because they are not able. “I believe and hope that the awareness will last over time” also for the related environmental effects. Not energy-intensive micro-entrepreneurs are, too, starting to address this issue more and they consider measures, such as photovoltaic, batteries, etc. They move to see what can be done. “However, I see it harder in micro-enterprises”. Many micro-enterprises suffer and try to move forward.

In my family, there has always been attention not to waste, and to the environment; above all in my generation and my parents, there was a sense of respect, rather than attention to the environment. More out of respect than for the effects of pollution. Whereas now, I see that there is a lot of attention, right from kindergarten, to respect the environment as such (heating of the earth, lack of water, etc.), with the implementation of

a lot of projects. “The generation of this age group is much more sensitised than previous ones”

Quotes

I am trying to raise awareness on the subject (energy-efficiency ed.). I had never done this before.

It is above all the little entrepreneurs who find themselves in serious difficulty to pay their bills and many are not paying them because they just can't do it.

Keywords

Energy-saving, cost-increase, dismiss production lines, awareness, ethics

RL4_IT02, Italy, Sandra made choices that allow maximum energy savings

Narrative

I am Sandra, a woman entrepreneur. I am 53 years old. I am working in this enterprise since the end of my studies, that is, more than 30 years ago. I have a husband and two sons and all of them are working in this enterprise that, therefore, is a family enterprise. The chief of the enterprise is me. In my life, I met several problems. Not everybody, among men, is convinced that a woman can lead an enterprise as good as a man; so, I met some scepticism, a few times also among my employees. However, not so much and this never entailed major problems. Conversely. I met a few problems, sometimes, in finding the right balance between my entrepreneurial work and my family life. Services that should help women in this regard are poor and, at the end of the day, I needed the help of family, in particular grandparents. This is a serious deficiency in Italy. We are a small enterprise on a site of 2,000 square meters where we installed ourselves in 2008. We have 14 employees (6 women and 8 men). Our production is almost entirely focused on small metal parts. When we decided to move to a new manufacturing site (the older one was too small), 4 years ago in 2018, we implemented everything in terms of installations according to the latest regulations, implementing choices that allow maximum energy savings. First of all, the building selected, due to its characteristics, resulted in energy savings. Then, regarding lighting, we installed LED lamps. We use the heating very infrequently – just 3 or 3,5 months every year - as it is the machinery itself that heats the production site. The machinery has been replaced over time with the latest generation of machines that result in very low power consumption. The energy consumption,

proportionally, has been greatly reduced. We also do small parts assembly. Among the machines, the most consuming ones are the assembly robots. We are improving these machines in order to reduce their energy consumption as much as possible. During the summer, we use evaporative cooling. We do not have air conditioning because it would be too expensive. Our goal is now to reduce even more the energy impact by installing solar panels, which we have not done yet, so that we are able to self-produce the maximum amount of energy to meet our needs. We are checking if there are any calls for tenders/other funding opportunities coming out in order to make this investment, which could be around 100,000 Euro; however, presently, we have not found anything. When we moved, 4 years ago, we tried to implement everything that could be helpful, both in terms of energy and environmental impact, as far as we could of course. We should remember that, when we moved, there was not much industrial real estate available. We looked for buildings that were still being completed precisely because we were aiming for energy savings. If we had chosen an old or otherwise complete building, we would have had to either adapt ourselves or redo everything from the ground up. Therefore, we chose a building that allowed us to complete it as we needed to, putting in place what was possible at that time in terms of energy savings, heating and so on. In addition, we chose a building that had, in any case, only been built a few years ago and was, in terms of structure, already in a fairly high energy class.

Throughout our process, we have met no obstacles, thanks to the professionals we have found and who have assisted us. We have had no financial difficulties because we are connected to banks and fortunately have no solvency problems. The property was purchased by leasing. On the other hand, I had difficulty identifying contributions/subsidies that would facilitate these operations for us, as far as I understood, because we are a middle way between craft and industry. We found no contributions that would allow us to lower the purchase cost of the building. Instead, we benefit from tax credits in connection with the purchase/renewal of machinery. Site relocation has meant that employees who used to live 1 km from home are now 15 km away. We have therefore made working hours flexible and introduced a canteen for people who previously used to eat at home. Everyone is much happier with the new production area, which is much larger and much more functional. It is a little difficult to see how the situation will evolve in the future. Hopefully, the energy problem will be resolved. Now, regarding electricity, we have contracts that until March save us a little, because it is a mix between a fixed and a variable price. We are trying to activate everything we can with regard to heating. We do not have a fixed price on gas and even what we use could be really expensive. We are trying to avoid heat loss. Despite all this, energy costs have doubled compared to two years ago. We do not know what will happen after March, but hopefully the situation will improve between now and then. Anyway, where heating is used the most (e.g. canteen), we plan to lower the temperature by one or two degrees this year. We also plan to order thermal shirts to be distributed to everybody. Looking at what other small companies are doing, it seems to me that everyone is moving towards lowering the heating in production areas by one or two degrees. Buying, as us, thermal shirts.

Everyone builds their own culture during their lifetime. When I started working, there was not so much sensitivity to the environment. Things have evolved gradually and now there is a strong sensitivity, even in the generations before ours as I see, for example, when talking to my mother. I hope the international situation will settle down and we can recover after a year of pandemic, then the commodities problem, now the energy crisis.

Even looking around, we are starting to get a bit tired of having to solve problems every day. At my level, after the pandemic, I did not realise we were heading for such an energy crisis. It is hard.

Quotes

We benefit from excellent cooperation from all employees.

Every day is more and more problematic.

Keywords

Family enterprise, energy-saving, work-life balance, thermal shirts, lack of subsidies/contributions, flexible hours

RL4_IT03, Italy, Giuseppe wants to encourage other micro/small enterprises to also adopt EEMs

Narrative

I am Giuseppe, I am 45 years old. I am working in the enterprise since immediately after graduating from technical school in mechanics. I started out working on lathes, then moved up to production manager and finally, for a few years now, I have been managing director. Since I started to work without any university studies, in the last decades I did a lot of training courses. I think that training is essential. Times are getting faster and faster and you have to constantly keep up. The company was founded by 5 brothers in 1964 in the mechanical field. At the beginning, we worked on behalf of third parties for larger companies and then, step by step, we started buying our machinery, even though we work still partly on behalf of third parties. Now, we have 33 employees, including some migrants. Our turnover is around 5 million Euro. We have two production departments: multi-spindles, and lathes and CMC. Since 13 years, we consider ourselves a 4.0 enterprise. We continuously analyse data to improve our processes thanks to these data. Since ever we are dealing with environmental issues. Particularly since 2005. First of all, we decided to use only vegetable oils, even though they cost more, to protect workers' health. Second, in 2009 we installed solar panels thanks to the availability of incentives allowing us to do an investment otherwise impossible at that time, and for our wish to

adopt ecological measures. Then, we purchased the first electric vehicle and now almost all the vehicles in the enterprise are electric or hybrid. Since those times, we wished to represent ourselves as an ecological enterprise, also to give a social message to our local community. We put in light sensors and then put in LED lamps also to solve a 'conflict': some employees would turn up the lights (in full sunlight) and my father (at that time the manager) would turn them down. The insertion of the LED not only decreased electricity consumption but also decreased internal disputes. We then installed an innovative air-conditioning and heating system in the offices, which resulted in a 70% reduction in energy consumption. Then we installed a 'water-pass' air-conditioning system in the production departments, which lowers the perceived temperature by eight degrees. We try to periodically renew the company's vehicles: they must not be more than four years old, so that they are 'efficient' and low-polluting. We are convinced that care for the environment goes hand in hand with economic benefits. Finally, we try to respect the principles of the circular economy on which we are well advanced using a lot of recycled material. Finally, we have a nice garden where we put plants that transform CO₂. We have also studied several hypotheses for a further switch to renewable energies (geothermal, mini-wind, oil burning, etc.) in order to try to become fully energy self-sufficient, but we have discarded them for lack of sustainability. We are now starting to consider hydrogen, which is very expensive but promising.

For sure, we are looking for further incentives in the future. Next week we will install a new plant for which we benefit from a 40% incentive and we'll find further incentives in the PNRR.

Incentives are important, but what is needed above all is to help companies understand how to spend their money on energy. What is needed is a change of approach, a change of mentality. Everyone should do their own research or hope that the right consultant will come along and give them the right advice. I am very attentive, but I find it difficult to find the appropriate information and, moreover, since I don't have the expertise, I have to trust what they tell me. And it is not always correct. Lack of easily available information is a major problem.

People is the central issue. In my company, there are a lot of very good people, some of whom – “the drivers” - also make very good suggestions for improving our environmental sustainability, and many others who follow company policies. But there are also 30%-40% of people who do not understand its importance and whose behaviour is not appropriate. And sometimes, out of simple 'opposition'. For example, we practice differentiated waste collection. And there are people who, despite having plastic and paper bins next to each other, throw plastic into the paper bin. I, faced with such behaviour, go on a rampage (then I calm down...). The greatest obstacle we have encountered and are encountering is making some people understand that the preservation of resources is in everyone's interest. The central issue is changing behaviour not only in the company but then in the family, everywhere. “People are the most complicated issue... but we insist on our mission to educate people”.

Finally, as a company, we have for several years been carrying out activities with our employees in cooperation with the local health authority that supports certain social areas (in relation to nutrition, psycho-physical well-being, alcohol use, gambling, etc.). People are better off that way. Our policy is to elevate the corporate culture, also in nutrition and beyond. For example, on the first week of the month we distribute free fruit to all employees. Then there is a showcase where we expose news or curiosities. For

example, for some time the results of research of Natta, Italian Nobel Laureate for Chemistry, who was born near here. It is true that we now know about the damage of plastic, but his invention remains a revolution of which we must be proud.

We are not an energy-intensive company, but we are neither a non-energy-intensive company. We are in the middle. The cost of energy went from 0.06 to 0.55 per kWh between 2020 and 2022. Then it went down a bit. What do we do? We suffer. For the moment we can support it, while others can't, they close the plants and send people on layoffs. We will see. In the meantime, we continue our research on renewable sources, hoping to reach energy autonomy one day. We are also about to proceed with the installation of energy consumption sensors on each plant and, based on the data we will obtain, something else can be done by introducing new technologies. Many micro and small businesses do not pay attention to environmental issues and have done nothing until recently. Now many are trying to do something given the soaring cost of energy, but it is often too late. These things cannot be done overnight. However, I have several entrepreneur friends and, taking advantage of the moment, I intend to try to help them as much as I can. Unfortunately, if I think of the mass, those who do things for ethics are very few. Culture is missing. In this company, I think I have contributed a lot to give a pro-environmental footprint. I try to be an innovator even through nonsense (like the showcase). I brought these ideas to the company and others allowed me to do so. Nobody opposed it even if maybe the others deal with something else. I have carte blanche.

Quotes

We are convinced that care for the environment goes hand in hand with economic benefits.

I think that companies must do, despite everything, more for the environment, for social issues, and for the territory in which they are located. They should contribute to the spread of an environmental culture among young people and children.

Keywords

Training, energy-efficiency, people/employees as central issue, information, corporate culture, renewable energy, pro-environmental footprint

RL4_IT04, Italy, Federica's enterprise pursues energy saving and recycling



Narrative

My name is Federica, and I am a 40-year-old entrepreneur. I am married and have a 4-year-old son. I graduated in medicine and surgery, but a year later, I came down with a lung disease that will make it impossible for me to enter a hospital for the rest of my life. I, therefore, had to 'reinvent' my life. I took a second degree in business economics, and then I did a specific course which was of no use to me; because what 'really' means to be an entrepreneur I then learned from reality. I think that trade associations, however, should improve their support to enterprises. After several jobs, all with fixed-term contracts that never lasted more than a year, but anyway very useful, I decided to start my own business with my husband. We started with nothing. We bought a truck with promissory notes. We proceeded in small steps by investing everything we had.

Now, we are a micro family enterprise where my husband and I work, with just one employee. We are in the process of hiring a second one to replace the one who was there and we had to dismiss due to theft. We deal in the recycling of metal/recyclable materials (aluminium, steel, copper, brass, iron, bronze) and intermediation of non-hazardous waste (paper/cardboard, wood, plastic/pvc, aggregates). The company was established seven years ago. We have a fair turnover. We have obtained several certifications that are very important for us. We have a warehouse and a truck for transporting materials. The warehouse is rented out and will have to be decommissioned within a few years because with the expansion of the close urban area, it is now in a residential area. We had asked the owner to install solar panels to power our machinery (the cost is around €3,000 per month), but as the roof would have to be redone, he refused. For these two reasons, we are looking for a new warehouse to move into. We intend to buy it and then run it as we see fit. We will certainly install solar panels in the new warehouse. We have already identified an appropriate site. However, moving in the new warehouse will take two years/two and a half years, also because it takes a long time to obtain authorisations for our activities. In 2019 we replaced the old, outdated lighting system with a new-generation LED system, which is more efficient and consumes much less energy. We also replaced the old truck with a Euro 5 truck that consumes less fuel. We have purchased machines that serve to reduce the debris and thus allow more of it to be brought in, saving further fuel. We also try to organise transport in such a way that, as far as possible, there are no trips where it goes empty. For the material that is transported to our shed, we have set up a booking system on our website to avoid as much as possible the trucks queuing with their engines running, wasting fuel. Finally, we have digitalised all our transactions to avoid paper consumption and we have nearly eliminated plastic. We want to improve ourselves further, moving to the new site, further improving the production process with more space, better machinery (4.0) and being a company that recycles and reuses materials suitable for someone else's production process. Something completely different from what the old scrap dealers used to be. To a large extent we already are.

We have not made use of incentives or financial contributions in the past, but we hope to do so in the future, even though these are often costly practices. Once we tried in the past and had to spend 2,000 Euro for a consultant, but then (although we scored excellently) we did not get the financing. There would also be calls related to the circular economy that would be interesting, but we are too small. We would have to get together with others, which is difficult, as we are competitors. Alone we do not have the strength. Looking at the other companies, I see a clear break. There are important companies that

have adapted to the circular economy while, unfortunately, most of the micro-enterprises, like ours, are struggling to fit into this new context. 60% because of ignorance and 40% because of lack of will. A lack of interest, not a lack of competences. In the same sector of my enterprise, there are mostly people who have been doing a similar job for at least two or three generations and have the same way of doing things, often also using very polluting means of transport and do not care about energy efficiency. They probably save money by doing so at present; but soon they will be at a crossroads: either they will adapt or they will have to stop their activity. With these micro-entrepreneurs there are often discussions, but then everyone goes their own way. With suppliers and customers, we try to be as helpful as possible by meeting their needs (e.g., regarding payment timeline or transport arrangements; we are also competitive because we are willing to buy the materials for recycling assembled - and not already divided - and then we can sort them ourselves). However, we are uncompromising about the way we work, including the rejection of cash payments (in black) and we have lost a lot of clients for this reason. In the end, this pays off. 2020 was a very tough year. We benefited from a subsidy of 25,000 Euro against the many (much higher) costs we had to bear with production stopped for a few months. But in 2021 we achieved a higher turnover than in 2019. However, it is not a good time, due to price volatility and the difficulty in selling our 'product' (due to Covid, plus the economic crisis, and war). With great difficulty, we are able to keep our suppliers, even buying large quantities of material to prevent it from being sold to someone else, and we have to keep it before we can process it and then manage to sell it. Now, finally, bit by bit, we are selling.

In the future, I hope my company will grow (having from 7 to 10 employees) by benefiting from the latest-generation machinery and with very few emissions. My culture and my family have been very important. They taught me humility, and a willingness to learn, which have been indispensable in my entrepreneurial life. I am passionate about it; I study various issues personally (including legal aspects). First, there are ethical aspects, and then comes energy efficiency and the environment. Finally, I am the same person at home as in the enterprise. And the house is already mine and I am already in the process of installing the solar panels.

Quotes

I think that enterprise associations should do more to help entrepreneurs"; "Most of the micro-entrepreneurs working in the same sector as me do not care about energy efficiency and environmental issues in general.

Keywords

Micro family enterprise, certifications, solar panels, recycling, energy-saving, ethics

RL4_IT05, Italy, Alfredo wishes for more cooperation and solidarity among entrepreneurs

Narrative

I am 56 years old, and I have been working in this enterprise for more than 30 years I am one of the associates-founders and I follow the commercial and managerial area, while my brother is supervising the technical area.

This enterprise is working in the sector of industrial automation since 1992. In the beginning, we were a software house and today we are building part of the switchboards that are used for industrial automation. We have 10 employees in 600 square meters divided into two warehouses; a part for programming, planning, research & development as well as commercial and administrative offices; a part used as a workroom where the wiring, switchboards and construction of the systems are made. Products are then sold to customers operating in the plant construction sector; in fact, we produce the control systems for those who make the plant systems. Basically, we operate on the process and not on the machine and therefore we are automation builders. Our activity needs a strong relationship with our clients, who are those responsible for the processes and therefore describe what the operations and lines will be that we must translate into bits and bytes so that everything works smoothly. In 30 years we have gone from a software production plus a small electronics production to becoming integrators of electronic control systems produced by large companies on which we then build the design and programming, as well as the control systems. We have not dealt so much with energy-efficiency issues since we are not an energy-intensive enterprise. Our emissions are very little (some electric engines). Our engines are PCs + some machinery such as drill presses and cutters. Regarding the heating of our warehouses, we have been using a classic boiler for years. In 2019 we started the renovation of this entire structure. All the air conditioning was replaced, except for a convector which remained in the workroom. The offices, canteen and common areas have become managed by a heating and cooling system with a much more efficient heat pump system. In 2019 we also started the installation process of a photovoltaic system, complementary to the heating and cooling system. In 2020 everything came to a standstill and the photovoltaic was fully operational only in 2021. Therefore, from 2021, we have our own production of electricity. All this has improved comfort and lowered costs, in addition to the ethical effects on the environment. For installing the photovoltaic we met bureaucratic barriers (e.g. we waited for authorisation for 7 months) plus the problems connected with the pandemic. We needed, as a whole, two years and a half. We are in the components sector and all of this was incomprehensible to us. Moreover, 2021 was characterised by very good weather, therefore photovoltaics could have benefited from splendid sunny days. This has not happened. We have further plans for the future. First of all, the doubling of photovoltaics, which currently feeds only half of the area. It was not done in a single solution because we also had to redo the roof which was in asbestos and was replaced by a modern one that

allows greater energy efficiency. We will have to make the other half roof in 2023 and then install photovoltaic. This project depends only on economic issues. Another project would be the climatisation of the structure and therefore the remaking of the windows, including seals and wall treatments. But in this regard, we are trying, in vain, to have the relevant information, more specifically on the possible payback and on possible fiscal incentives, to be able to decide. The calculations and opinions are mixed and we are looking for further competent advice. We want to understand if and to what extent this will be functional in saving money, improving the working environment, and reducing emissions, as it was for what we have done so far. Finally, we have transformed, with the pandemic, our mobility. We used to go to our customers, by car, by plane, etc. Now we meet them much more “at distance”. Therefore, we intend to rearrange the car fleet. We have to say that this change in mobility sometimes can upset the way people work, e.g. since we also have to start plants in Japan. While we used to take the plane, now we wake up at 3 in the morning and participate in the meeting remotely. So far, we have almost always managed alone. We just had tax advice. From now on, we look forward and hope to have more external support (e.g. by enterprises’ federations). We took advantage of public financial contributions to make the work environment safer/healthier.

All the actions we promote for energy saving have the full consent of our employees. Two of them were also involved in specific technical interventions. We will also ask them (and they are already warned) that they will have to allow the heating to be lowered and therefore dress appropriately, perhaps putting on an extra shirt. There is common awareness of this. On the other hand, we have been together for years and we talk with them about every decision. We are experiencing the impact of the increase in the cost of energy. Not so much for our energy consumption (also thanks to the measures adopted), but because, in this context, some of our clients are cancelling previously placed orders, foregoing investments planned for automation. And some of our acquaintances are closing their businesses. Furthermore, we face a shortage of materials as there are also our suppliers who suspend their activities. We are not at all comfortable, because these problems are beyond our scope of action. This is all starting to transform us. There is more collaboration and less competition among entrepreneurs, especially for a year now. Previously, we mostly kept ourselves isolated from our competitors. For a year now, while maintaining some competition, we have begun to help each other. There is almost a tendency to network. I would even speak of solidarity between us to find solutions together, or to benefit from already tested solutions without trying to invent hot water again. This is a good thing and promising for the future.

Quotes

Our employees have always expressed assent, if not gratitude, for what we have done (on energy saving).

It can be said that a shift from competition to collaboration (among entrepreneurs) has begun a year ago.

Keywords



Renovation, photovoltaic, energy-saving, remote meetings, energy-cost increase, solidarity

RL4_IT06, Italy, Alberto contributes to climate change mitigation by promoting low-impact materials

Narrative

I am Alberto. I am 57 years old. I am the manager of the enterprise (4 people) at the technical and decision-making level. Some years ago, our business was only to modify some processes based on solutions that are no longer viable in the use of materials that have perhaps become banned by legislation, perhaps for health reasons, or are not viable for other reasons. Our clients came to us in search of alternative materials to those used until yesterday. An emblematic case is related to asbestos. Many other cases (e.g. rock fibres) have been forgotten. Having said that, the materials we are responsible for are all those related to thermal insulation, fireproofing and acoustic insulation. In this area, we endeavour to develop different solutions that are compatible with the market, but at the same time use recyclable materials as much as possible. Not to be destroyed or imagined in an incinerator at the end of their life-cycle, but designed, as far as possible, as recyclable. A prime example is the recycling of glass fabric artefacts from the world of electronics. Here, the 'second-rate materials' are actually almost perfect; however, until recently, they were put into storage. We have found a way to recycle them by preventing them from being amalgamated with often toxic resins (capable of producing polluting gas in the event of combustion) and becoming unrecoverable, put in landfills where they practically never disintegrate. It is not a cycle that we have the ability to have totally under control in all its phases. But it is still a cycle that we have created anyway. In the world of batteries, we deal with various waste materials that are properly treated and return to the market. Even polyethylene felts that we have made sure are reintroduced into different areas. We have also patented some of them in the automotive sector; but unfortunately, because of the focus on cost-effectiveness or habits, these solutions have not been adopted. Conversely, often, materials where the recycling capacity is much lower are kept; whereas instead, in the automotive sector at least 35% of the used materials either have to come from recycling or be recyclable at the end of their life. Beyond apparent innovations, attempts are made to preserve old ways of proceeding in order to protect those who, through such ways, have always gained money. This is possible, however, because legislation is lacking; and there is a lack of serious circulation of information; and a lack of ethics. In Italy there are many small, highly advanced companies, but often their

know-how is swallowed up by large companies that have little know-how. And their know-how is not, in fact, even legally protected.

We are a micro enterprise but we collaborate with third parties for our R&I activities. Our contribution to the protection of the environment and also to the mitigation of climate change is in making even large companies adopt materials with zero or low environmental impact, also in terms of emissions. This is possible because we work with those who produce the materials they use. We analyse the production cycles of the materials they use and propose solutions to vary these materials (where appropriate). Of course, we are aware of the modification limits: there are materials that are not recyclable anyway and materials that can be only partially recyclable. But the important thing is to conceive materials to be as recyclable as possible from the start, while in general this problem was addressed only at the end of the life cycle of a material. We are not an energy-intensive enterprise. Our energy consumption is very limited. The only recent change is that now we limit our mobility as much as possible. We used to move a lot to visit fairs, our customers, etc. and now we have drastically reduced our mobility (and related energy consumption).

In my opinion, there is little attention to the environmental issues in SMEs/micro enterprises. This is a huge problem, given that in Italy the vast majority of companies are micro or small. There is more attention in large companies. However, even here, I do not see the realisation of projects that involve an effective transformation in the medium and long term. There are many beautiful ideas and many imaginative projects in function of the acquisition of funds. Many conventions and meetings. Little concretization. Then there would be some micro and small businesses that actually do R&D, but have enormous problems in obtaining even small loans. I, for example, have tried; but I was not even able to get 1,000 non-repayable Euros (grant) for R&D. We have never even benefited from incentives. We didn't even understand how we could proceed to obtain them. And it is the same for other micro/small enterprises that do R&D in sustainable energy innovative solutions.

The responsibility also lies with the certification bodies which sometimes do not have the ability to recognise these types of activities. We, for example, have been certified as a reseller/manufacturer of housewares. And the consequent codification excluded us from any R&D funding. If you don't control the system - and I don't control it - you are kicked out of possible opportunities. The bureaucratic system (in this case of the certifications) is totally ineffective. And the current rise in the cost of energy is mere speculation. Looking to the future, we are pushing hard on the electric market, trying to solve some problems, often ignored, related to electric safety, for example, with regard to the ignition of batteries, which is why the market does not go too much on "full electric". Using recycled and low-impact materials as much as possible, we are looking for solutions that can solve these problems; and in part we have already succeeded. We are collaborating with the national agency for energy in this regard to be able to certify such solutions. The technical interlocution is excellent. The bureaucratic one is less so. We will see.

Quotes

We have found a way to recycle the 'second-rate materials' cleanly and such materials no longer go to landfill.



Attention to the environment is almost non-existent in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

Keywords

Recyclable materials, materials' cycle, material's end of the life, certification, research & development (R&D)

RL4_IT07, Italy, Giusy helps micro-entrepreneurs to become eco-friendly

Narrative

I am Giusy, I am 43 years old and I am the co-founder of a micro-enterprise that wishes to help entrepreneurs to be more eco-friendly through the adoption of green-tech innovation solutions. We started our activities a few weeks before the Covid epidemic erupted in the north of Italy (in January 2020). We, therefore, went through a very difficult period because a few days after our start-up we got stuck and were stuck for a few months. Then, once the first wave of the epidemic had passed, we started up again, always with great difficulty because the companies to whom we provide our services had other things to think about. Nevertheless, we engaged ourselves in the search of start-ups having, possibly, some interest in the type of consultancy we are able to offer. It was very difficult. Not only because of the particular moment in which we started our activities, but also because we had to find companies and people who shared our business system, had our same value system, and our same passions. We were mainly targeting start-ups. We also had a lot of difficulties in the initial phase in making ourselves known, as we had no references. Our branding was unknown. After a difficult first period, 'taking advantage' of the energy crisis that began before the war with Ukraine and then amplified, we turned to industries to help them solve their critical issues through our work with start-ups around the world. What we are currently being asked to do is not only about energy efficiency, but more generally about finding innovations to increase eco-sustainability. There is an awareness that is growing in this regard, also among SMEs. Until recently, this was not the case. And only a few companies - e.g. those with an innovation manager - were interested.

We are a green micro-enterprise. The energy we use is provided by photovoltaic panels that power us and we have an over-production of energy compared to our needs. The building we work in is green although gas has been produced here for a long time. Therefore, we have no energy efficiency problems. We have a statute that prevents us

from distributing profits among shareholders and commits us to reinvest it in green-tech innovation in favour of start-ups and for Research & Innovation. We can say that we are neither non-profit nor for-profit. We are entrepreneurs, but we don't want profit for ourselves. We are characterised by an integrated culture between ethics, social, economic and environmental concerns. We have access to some tax credits related to Research & Development. Today, although many regulatory and financial difficulties persist, there are many solutions that guarantee eco-sustainability and cost reduction. There are solutions that can be implemented easily and immediately - e.g. those based on solar thermal or agro-voltaic. Many of these solutions also combine environmental and social issues. Then there are more complex solutions. For example, in the textile world, dyeing consumes a lot of energy and water. A solution through super-critical CO₂ can overcome this problem. It is a new and experimental solution, but what is new and experimental must be tried. Otherwise, it never starts. The same goes for the circular economy. We throw away a lot of stuff that could instead be a source of energy or, in any case, be reused. See also hydrogen. We produce green hydrogen and put it on the grid. The solutions are there. These solutions entail a cost, but it may pay for itself in the following year. The companies that invest in this direction, despite these bad times, tend to have an increase in turnover, productivity and profitability (while companies that don't do this, tend, instead, to decrease their turnover). These companies are much more successful in retaining their skilled people. They only succeed if they pay attention to ethics and environmental and/or social sustainability: those who have a 'why'. We need to work first on culture; then on awareness. Taking entrepreneurial risks is also needed here. One has to be a pioneer (as were those who installed photovoltaics in 2007, who are still earning for that choice of 15 years ago). Everyone can practise energy efficiency: at a basic level with well-proven solutions, even better by adopting slightly more innovative solutions (e.g. latest generation solar thermal); and then there is disruptive innovation where processes and business models are completely changed and where we are not based on tested solutions (e.g. super-critical CO₂). The proven solution will be available in one, two or three years, but the business of the future is built on this. Now, some SMEs are also converging on this approach and not just the more structured companies. And our task is to facilitate the SMEs, above all for the adoption of second and third level solutions, with respect to which, usually, they do not have the necessary skills internally (while they usually do for the basic level). We try to make SMEs understand that they can have competitive advantages from day one. We also help them to make a sustainability report. We seek appropriate solutions for everyone. If, for example, an SME does not have the possibility to install photovoltaics on the roof and is located in an agricultural area, we suggest agro-voltaic. We also focus on integrating businesses into the local territory, also with a social purpose.

A central question is that SMEs are able to see all this as an opportunity and not as a burden, as "something I have to do", as happened in the past with reference to quality certifications. The main barrier that must be faced is a cultural barrier. You need to have a broad vision, while some small entrepreneurs say they "don't have the time". These small businesses are bound to die. Also because the millennial generation has environmental sustainability as its main concern. So in a few years these entrepreneurs will no longer have a market. They won't sell anymore. Conversely, those who promote innovation can find the funds they need. Not for 100% coverage, but still to cover a good chunk. The opportunities are there.

Quotes

Our corporate mission is to help companies drastically reduce their emissions and thereby contribute to safeguarding the planet.

Enterprises have understood that eco-sustainable innovation can become a competitive advantage.

We believe that there can be no sustainable innovation if it is not integrated into a cultural mechanism that unites social, ethical and territorial aspects.

Keywords

Eco-sustainability, green-tech, culture, ethics, energy efficiency

RL4_IT08, Italy, Claudia promotes eco-sustainability in food production

Narrative

I am Claudia. I am 30 years old. With my brother, I founded this micro-enterprise in the food sector with my brother. My brother is an engineer; I am an expert in entrepreneurial business. Now we are four. All young people. Our farm produces galettes, corn chips, various kinds of flour, crisps and biscuits. My brother takes care of production and marketing; I take care of the administrative part. We believe much more in cooperation than in competition. For example, we make our maize galettes production machinery available, producing maize galettes on a third-party basis for all the farms in the area that cannot afford to buy a production plant for their small production. Only through cooperation can small and micro companies in our sector hold their own in competition with large multinationals. We have to maximise the use of resources and also provide other equipment. We started with a machine. Then we had two, then three ... We slowly grew up doing hard work under difficult socio-economic conditions. But we were - and we are - a group of young people with a passion for agriculture and eco-sustainability. Since we started from scratch, we were free from traditional constraints. We couldn't say, "we must continue to do this because it has always been done this way". Nevertheless, we value our area's agricultural customs: cropping involves using only natural methods, excluding chemical fertilisers, herbicides and even grain refining. We started with a "green" perspective from the beginning. And then, we tried and are trying to improve



ourselves. For example, we have recently equipped ourselves with a roller mill to decrease energy consumption. We avoid machine downtime to save energy (continuous production from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm). Conversely, a machine such as a labelling machine that is only needed at certain times is turned on only when it is needed. We grind ourselves directly to avoid mobility costs. In addition, all equipment used in the company is periodically repaired and maintained to ensure that it does its job as long as wear and tear permits. Nothing is discarded that can be repaired or that is not dangerous for the user. In our company, we only practice waste separation. All production waste is recycled: paper, plastic, glass, iron, cardboard, and wood. Furthermore, we use plastic as little as possible, but for some operations it is essential. The waste from processing corn cakes (flour and broken cakes) is collected by local farmers who give it to their animals. We also recycle the sacks where grain is kept, and as far as possible the pallets as well. We are located in a rural area where it is very cold and therefore we never need air conditioning. But we also don't have heating. The areas where production takes place are heated by the heat of the machinery, and in the office, we only use an electric heater. In each room, the lights are turned on only when needed and are promptly turned off. The administrative management and, as far as possible, the commercial one take place online. Of course, we have to provide transportation for our products, but we do so through agreements with couriers and buyers that allow us to minimise consumption in transportation (grouping orders according to destinations). We have access to the electricity that our father's (textile) company produces, which is equipped with photovoltaic panels. Regardless, so far we have not been affected by the increase in the cost of energy as we are still safeguarded by past supply contracts which, given our situation, we hope to confirm under similar conditions. We have, however, obviously suffered from the economic crisis of the past few years, but we have managed to continue.

We have never taken advantage of public funding or tax incentives, although we have tried to get them. In fact, for micro-businesses like ours, these opportunities hardly exist. We look to the future quite convinced that we have made some right choices, but with considerable concern given the context of the last few years and the one in which we find ourselves today. We have made it through hard work, many sacrifices, passion, and cooperation with others. We hope to be able to continue.

Quotes

We are young farmers who have made a bet on sustainability.

Cooperation is the heart of our business model.

Keywords

Cooperation, sustainability, energy efficiency, recycling, avoid any waste of resources

RL4_IT09, Italy, Marcello is distrustful of citizens' willingness to change their behaviour

Narrative

I am Marcello, I am 46 years old and I am with my wife Giuseppina the founder of a social micro-enterprise, born from the ashes of a previous cooperative, aimed at lowering the environmental impact of enterprises. The cooperative existed since 2014 and promoted everything that could be useful for the re-use and re-purposing of products, the use of food and household products with an ultra-short supply chain and 95% non-degradable. It also conducted training courses. However, the cooperative did not do well, as the management costs were prohibitive. The cooperative was supposed to be a self-sustainable enterprise through its own activities and the sale of products. An entrepreneurial network was born, but many actors have since ceased their activities due to a certain lack of interest from the end consumer. So, this social enterprise was born in 2018, in recognition of these distortions on the end consumers' side, resulting from the consumerist education they received. I, too, am guilty of having contributed to building the wrong economic model that led to the 2020 pandemic crisis, which is, in reality, a disease of pollution that had already manifested itself with previous pandemics (e.g. SARS) from the most polluted areas of the planet. We had mistakenly thought that local microeconomic systems were almost immune to these global trends. The Covid experience was alienating but at the same time educational. The social promotion association, which has taken the place of the cooperative, exists and resists because the regulatory framework for social enterprises is cutting-edge and advantageous: low tax burdens, regulatory lightening in the supply of services, and access to grants, while also being able to have diversified relationships with companies. Within this framework, we adopt the logic of business incubation. We are three people working in the association and around us we have a network of about 15 external operators. Resuming the lines of action of the cooperative, in these 5 years, the association has promoted various activities. We started from the second-hand market and promoted the creation of markets open to private individuals, exploiting their creativity, their ability to recover and collect, and their networks for the sale of second-hand objects and products. This activity has also had an important social impact as we have also involved people who were isolated. Such people have experienced a boost as they have encountered other people who have similar stories. The energy of the network has allowed them to face difficult times. In our second-hand markets, which take place every month, 80/90 people exhibit each time, but overall there are about 300 who take turns frequently. Globally, we have involved nearly 1000 people. Stable customers of all social categories. Through the second-hand market, the life of products is extended. A further activity is the hive, which consists of developing a reference service for the short supply chain system at the service of agriculture and healthy local eating. Interested consumers register on a site to shop online, buying the products they want (fruit, vegetables, meat, honey, cheese, wine, etc.) offered for sale by

local producers who are part of the network. Once a week, distribution is organised in the local 'Hive'. The moment of picking up the groceries is transformed into an opportunity for relationships, direct contact and a moment of conviviality where producers can make their work and reality known. The hives had a positive peak during the pandemic but then collapsed in 2022, connected to the bad habits of consumers to go back to shopping in an "ordinary" way. Nevertheless, these activities have facilitated our presence in institutional networks of entrepreneurship and the Municipality. "Fridays for the future" was an important stimulus for our activities, considering their proactive capacity, and led us to promote 'conscious consumption' in the fashion sector, involving not only many large companies but also the micro and small enterprises operating in the textile industry in the area. The aim was to make them aware of how the preferences of young consumers are changing (preference towards low-environmental-impact products). This is the future. And not just in fashion. We are doing the same to innovate agricultural production. We have also received public funding to carry out educational activities in this regard in schools. Finally, we have a sartorial project to promote low-environmental-impact textiles, also involving prisoners. We have not been able to implement energy efficiency measures in our offices as we pay rent and the property owner has refused to help financially. Therefore, we have old fixtures, and an old lighting system and we spend 2,800 euros on bills. The law allows for all these paradoxes. So, our office has a high environmental impact. In the logic of extending products' lifetime, we continue to use an old LPG car and, when we will have to change it, it will be difficult for us to buy an electric car. So, we are a company that uses dilapidated structures. This is true also on the IT level, where we have old recycled computers. As regards the increases in energy costs, it should be emphasised that they have had a minimal impact on ultra-short-chain agricultural and textile products. If we were not in this supply chain, it would have been a disaster. My wife's family has greatly contributed to her eco-environmental education. I come from a farming family and I was a bad consumer for some time, but then I converted myself. We never experienced conflicts, since we do not fight the other economic actors (including multinationals). We only try to explain how consumers are changing. We help them. We are very confident in the future.

Quotes

The second-hand market is an open social exchange for sustainability.

People did not want to continue riding the change.

Keywords

Social micro-enterprise, Re-use and re-purposing of products, End consumers, Second-hand market, Short supply chain system, Conscious consumption

RL4_IT10, Italy, Social cooperatives have a hard time competing with profit enterprises on green issues

Narrative

My name is Saleh, I am 36 years old and have two children, aged three and six. I have a degree in business administration and I love working in the social sector. I work in a social cooperative enterprise that deals with all issues related to personal services. We have different poles of activities, from severe marginality to social housing, women's shelters, and migrant reception in the territory. We also deal with culture and training. I am in charge of the pole that focuses on issues related to work and the sustainable economy. We are involved in fostering the employment of people with social marginality in our services, which involve, for example, garment collection, cellar and storage clearance, maintenance, and waste oil pickup. We also have a beautiful store that gives new life to used items and an ecological platform for recycling clothing. Now we are also trying to set up a site where we can sell our products online. We also do environmental education and outreach activities on these issues, and we have several projects in this regard, including with schools. A few weeks ago we had the external environmental audit, whereas before we had done an internal audit with our reference consultants, who help us follow the frequent changes in environmental legislation. The biggest obstacles we face, in fully adopting an environmental perspective in our services, are economic, as it happens to all small social cooperatives like us. Unfortunately, we are suffering a lot economically, and we have a hard time making the investments that would be needed, but this is a pity because these are fundamental and very topical issues, where the for-profit world is also increasingly entering. I don't want to say that this is necessarily greenwashing. The for-profit world is using the environmental issue as a market issue, and they have all the resources to do that, whereas we are no longer able to get to their levels, and so they are winning a very important market. We try to draw on all available resources, the grants, the certificates. Some incentives are also there, but they are very difficult to get. Our projects are mostly funded by private foundations. The calls from the Ministry of Economic Development could help us, but they are designed for realities much larger than us. We are indeed part of important networks, and this facilitates access to grants and funds. But investments are required that a cooperative like ours cannot make. There is also another problem related to this. A cooperative has its own life cycle. Cooperatives start as small and then slowly get bigger. But the people, the members, are always the same. Having people with the right skills for the circular economy is not an easy thing. It is difficult to create a team for change, and in any case, it takes time. The founding partners may not understand the importance of these issues and their complexity. But sooner or later you have to get there, because in the meantime the for-profit sector is able to recruit. Environmental issues are becoming a start-up possibility and as a result, those who do a start-up hire people who are up-to-date and qualified on the issue. We then include foreigners and disadvantaged people as employees, and this makes the human resources

issue even more sensitive. Having partnerships or being part of consortia is a factor that helps, because it allows you to have bigger hats, so to speak, that allow you to improve and get into capacity-building paths. We are part of several networks, and in the territory, we have quite an important partnership. That's always if you solve the economic side, though, because then to create a new service, to access funds or procurements, the difficulties remain. We are too small. This is often the problem with the third sector. It has great potential because it works in contact with social and environmental realities and always manages to identify what the challenges are and what opportunities are related to these challenges. But then these opportunities are difficult for the non-profit to seize because they lack economic resources. And then the for-profit comes in. It's a great pity, because this cooperative for example has been working between the social and environmental worlds for a long time, since its inception as a cooperative in 2009, and even earlier if we consider the community that preceded it, starting in the late 1990s. It's just that social cooperatives like ours do a lot of things, but they have a hard time telling their stories, because even that requires resources. We always try to do that. If some extra resources come in from a project, we use them to put someone to work on the site and we start doing outreach. Investing in environmental sustainability also meets some resistance internally. Some of the members think it is something that sends us to a loss since resources are scarce. But actually, these are the issues that everyone is focusing on, and we have to gear up to do it better and better. With respect to our individual behaviours, we have an environmental educator who told us that we needed to activate internal pathways and not just consider the outside. This is not always easy, because it involves talking to members and also to employees. It takes a lot of internal training, but that also affects our resources. However, we have an energy-saving plan, which focuses on behaviour concerning lights and heating, and a waste plan. These programmes are not only there to save money but also to try to tell internally what we tell externally.

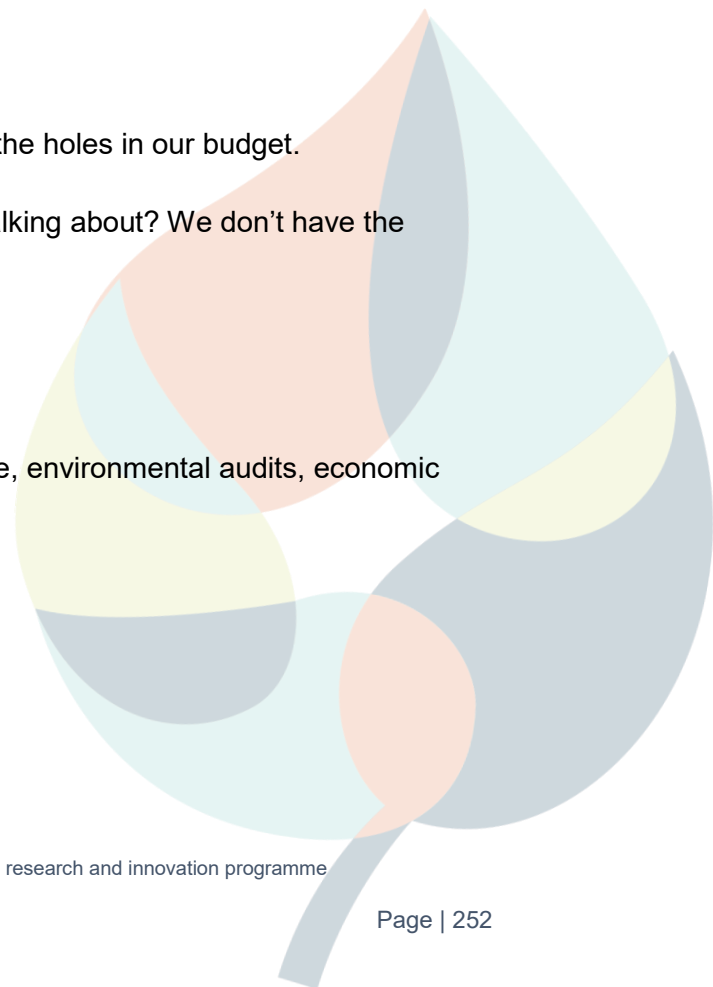
Quotes

We always try to carry ourselves forward and cover the holes in our budget.

Some cooperative members tell me, 'What are we talking about? We don't have the money to do more on environmental issues.'

Keywords

Social cooperative, non-profit sector, recycling, reuse, environmental audits, economic resources, human resources



RL4_GR01, Greece, Financially and environmentally sustainable eco-hotel

Narrative

I am a 50-year-old man from a village in north Greece and in 2014 I started a family business, a small hotel in Nea Vrasna. Beside my wife, who also works in the hotel, I have one employ full-time during the season time every year. I started the hotel with one team of experts (accountant, engineering, financial advisor) who helped to develop the business plan and to actually do the hotel. The basic motivation to start the hotel was a program from ESPA and the European union, which I learn from a friend who also helped me to find the financial advisor to support me with the application. This investment and innovation program from the government was a great opportunity for me. All my efforts with innovation were basically motivated by this programme which gave extra incentive and motivation to do a sustainable and eco-friendly business, because otherwise it would have been too expensive for me. I would not have been able to do it. I also obtained the eco-tourism label. A second motivation to follow green practices in the hotel was financial, that is, I have saved a lot of money due to the energy-saving practices I implemented. Ideology is also an important motivation. It is a very personal way of thinking, shared by my family, and I followed my ideology all the way through, and did everything as I wanted to do it. Even though, when I started there was not an eco-culture in Greece, only in the last two years the environment has entered the lives of Greek people. I am a nature lover, and this was due to my experiences, I love the mountain, the see, I am a diver...I was an officer in the special forces, so I had experienced a lot of situations in nature, in the mountain. I have experiences with sports, football, kayak, swimming...I also love gardening and flowers, I have everywhere flowers, at home, at work...I feel very satisfied that my business is promoted in the framework of eco-tourism. It fulfils me. Although, when I started there was not a green/eco-culture in Greece, I tried in my way to explain to others that this is the way forward, both in terms of being financially sustainable but also in terms of being environmentally sustainable. With regard to energy I have implemented three basic practices, solar panels & hitting pumps, energy-efficient construction, and energy-efficient windows/doors. I could do those because of the financial support from the programme I mentioned above. In 2014 these practices were innovative in Greece. In the hotel I have full autonomy with regards to energy due to the solar panels and the hitting pumps, this is very important for hot water, which I am able to have all day the full season, most important with zero cost. That is, when solar panels are not enough to heat the water, the system activates the pumps which use electricity from the batteries that are charged by the solar panels. So I have a 100% autonomy. The programme had very high economical returns, since I already have a high return on my initial investment for the solar panels, the batteries and the hitting pumps. This combined with the investment in construction to make the building energy-efficient, including energy efficient windows and doors, have made my business profitable and with high returns. All these have made a huge difference in how the hotel function, and have made hotel financially sustainable. I have also implemented several practices in relation to recycling and sustainable food.

With the help of the municipality I use cleaning services, recycling bins for plastic, paper and aluminium, and so our waste has been reduced by 60%. With, glass we have a common container with two other hotels, a bit further away. With regard to food, I prefer to serve in my hotel ecological products, and those produced locally, by friends, my family or people in the community. I have not managed to make the swimming pool in line with green practices because of the high cost that would entail. I would like to make this change, and I have thinking about it, but it is a lot of money. It has been also 10 years since we started the hotel, and I need to do renovations, so if there would be financial support from the government, even to cover a small percentage of the cost, I could make more sustainable changes, like the one with the swimming pool. It would be good to have those programmes directed to small businesses. I do not think that the eco-label has made a big impact in terms of attracting more clients, I do not think there is appreciation by the Greek market. I did have some foreigners that did come because of the eco-tourism label, and this is a win for me.

Quotes

The cheese I buy it from a friend, and the olives as well, and honey from a local producer. It is important. And why should I buy cheese from supermarkets or commercial providers, when I can buy from someone I know, and this is the one I eat at home as well. Because that local producer may after come to stay at my hotel, or may call their cousins from Florina and tell them to come and stay at my hotel.

...I like that my hotel is promoted within the framework of eco-tourism. It fulfils me in relation to environmental issues. The start was very much driven by the extra bonus that I was able to gain through the programme. That is, all the innovations that I did in my hotel gave me extra bonus and points to be included in the [ESPA/European] programme for eco-tourism. One thing brings the other, I had the right motivation, that I wanted to follow that programme, and since it helped me I was a 100% that I would do it despite the cost.

Keywords

Governmental support, sustainability, energy-efficient, eco-tourism

RL4_GR02, Greece, Distrust of Government and institutions

Narrative



I am a 57-year-old man who lives in a village in Halkidiki (north Greece), child of Greek migrants parents who migrated to USA for economical reasons, and then returned to Thessaloniki when I was an adolescents. I own a small hotel (two full time employees and one seasonal employee) in Halkidiki. I used to live in the city of Thessaloniki and in 2002 I decided to move to a village in Chalkidiki for a better life, because the situation was more difficult in the city. “When I was living in Thessaloniki, as an architect as well, I felt that there was not equality in the life struggle, because when you go with the truth upfront there is no progress. And if you are not the sort of person who wants to be part of [privileged] groups to make progress and money, you cannot find financial progress, therefore either you stay and die or move somewhere else at any cost. That was the main reason I decided to leave Thessaloniki” Also to start a new project (a rural hotel in the mountain of Brastama) since I could see signs of an upcoming economic crisis in Greece. From a young age I had a great interest in sustainability and already during the middle school I used to read at the library about solar energy. I have always been a nature-lover. I love nature not only as a spectator but in every possible way, I always had a particular talent with nature. For instance, I call tell about the weather by observing insects. In my business I have engaged with sustainable practices from the beginning. In 2003 I bought a composting bin, although it was expensive, and then got 4 more from the municipality. And continue to use all the composting bins and I have made a positive impact on the soil (forest) around my property, which used to have very small bushes and now is greener-like a forest. The impact of my composting practice can be easily seen and is very much appreciated by the locals. I think composting is an important sustainable practice in Greece since our diet is mostly based on non-processed fresh products so we have a lot of organic waste. I would love to use solar energy for my business, actually for some years now I had fixed the roof so that solar panels could be installed legally, but I do not feel supported by the system and policies, and so I have not done it yet. I did install a water solar heater; I do really try to do as much as I can with sustainable energy all these years. Also replaced all the light bulbs first with PL and then with LED...but energy companies are over-charging and exploiting the situation since there is not regulation or control from the government and I feel unprotected and not supported to implement sustainable energy practices like solar energy. Another problem is that the municipality does not provide basic facilitates for business like mine to implement sustainable practices, and they expect us to expend the money and provide the facilities. This is for instance the case for electrical cars, they expect us to provide the chargers. The same with waste management, the municipality does not provide with infrastructure and people resort to the easy way and through it to the forest. Overall, there is a lack of organisation and regulation/control by governmental institutions when it comes to sustainable practices.” In Greece the most important problem that drove us where we are and how we move ahead is that the existing laws are not implemented/enforced. In other words, laws are enforced only to those who are outside of the game. Outside of the [privileged] groups. Consequently, all the negative that we have in our life and in progress generally comes from this problem. And this is not a matter of culture or time to change the way of thinking. The main issue is that existing laws are not enforced/implemented, if laws would be enforced then the culture would follow...” There is not economical support, so money is one of the key obstacle to adopt sustainable practices. For instance, I am now planning to buy a new water solar heater, and solar panels to upgrade the heating system but I not counting on governmental financial support programmes that will come out at the end of

the winter...how is that useful? what do I do with the support once the winter is over?...and of course I have to do all the paper work and pay all the costs unless you make big investments/changes, if you want to make smaller energy changes to your business, the financial support you get from the government is not significant. The situation now is worse because of the lack of control/regulation from the government particularly in the current energy crisis, where prices for wood for instance are 4 times up...there seem not to be a real justification or logic for the current energy-prices for heating (e.g., wood, pellets). Providers are also exploiting the situation, and try to cheat the clients. But it is not only money, for instance solar energy infrastructure was initially too expensive, but now that is more affordable you cannot trust the energy companies that manage solar energy to keep their part of the deal and not exploit you. Corruption is a big problem in Greece. "these, the solar panels, I study them for many years now, and still I have not been able to conclude if I could be able to make a profit from solar panels as it is implied from those who promote it. For many years solar panels were very expensive and were not promoted by the so called State. Why in USA they were very cheap and in Greece so expensive? Now they are cheaper in Greece, and the State puts a long list of pre-requisites so that you become a slave of the provider [one of the main energy companies in Greece]..." I have not been treated equally, people are not treated equally, you need to belong to certain "privileged" groups to have access to money and resources. If you do not want (or cannot) belong to certain groups, then you cannot progress in Greece. For instance, during COVID, support money by the government was given to the "wrong" people, that is to those who did not need it, just because they belong to certain groups and have the right connections. There is a lack of transparency and legal stability (e.g., taxes) and political decisions are driven by personal economical gain and not by a real interest on sustainability. In Greece, there is no accountability and corruption is left unpunished.

Quotes

When I was living in Thessaloniki, as an architect as well, I felt that there was not equality in the life struggle, because when you go with the truth upfront there is no progress. And if you are not the sort of person who wants to be part of [privileged] groups to make progress and money, you cannot find financial progress, therefore either you stay and die or move somewhere else at any cost. That was the main reason I decided to leave Thessaloniki.

Whenever you go around in Chalkidiki, in every corner even under signs that say "Here do not through waste or garbage" you will see a mountain of garbage. In every water stream, valley, forest even on top of the mountain there are piles of waste.

Isn't that a justification for the Greek citizen to say "if they do not anything, why should I do it?" consequently, who controls the situation? Who is the one who shows any interest after all...? Shouldn't that be a central organism that cares about the implementation of certain things? And no matter how many times we went to the municipality about waste and garbage, because ultimately the mayor is the responsible, still the municipality does not

provide citizens with bins for heavy waste, bins for construction waste, or any kind of container any way, organisation, what can the citizen do?

Keywords

Intrinsic motivation, love for nature, inequality, corruption, legislation enforcement

RL4_GR03, Greece, Eco-tourism

Narrative

I am 47-year-old man and I was born in Germany from Greek parents who migrated for financial reasons. My parents returned to Greece when I was a child, but during the Greek economic crisis I myself migrated to Germany to make a better leaving. I did not like there thought and decided to come back to Greece and with the money I saved and opened a hotel in Halkidiki. I own a small hotel with 15 apartment rooms and 3 full time employees. I like to do outdoors activities in the nature, hiking, particularly in mount Olympus, and bicycling, and I like to think that I have ecological values.

Some years ago, I was thinking to do a renovation to my hotel, and totally by chance I saw in a Twitter from the Halikidiki Tourism Organisation (HTO) that there was a European Union programme to facilitate eco-label accreditations of business, that is a programme about European sustainable tourism businesses labels. The programme was educational and it supported the business to make the application for an eco-label by giving information and step by step guidance on what you had to do to obtain the accreditation. It helped you to create the portfolio but it did not provide any financial support. I made the application to the programme and got it, and so I manage to get the eco-label for my hotel.

The motivation to do the application to the European programme was only economical, since I thought that it would made my business more competitive in the region and attract more clients. The investment I made, I had to fulfil more than 90 requisites during the renovation, to obtain the eco-label did not pay-off as I had expected but it did have some benefits such as that the cost of electricity was reduced substantially. That is making the apartments more energy efficient (better isolation and windows) reduced significantly the energy consumption. This is very important for hotels in Greece, since during the summer the A/C must be open all the time. Also, because of better thermic isolation and windows I do not have any more problems like humidity. So from a construction point of view having energy efficient buildings in much better. The investment has not pay-off in terms of increasing my competitiveness and attracting more clients. I think in this specific region (Halkidiki) there is a lack of appreciation for eco-tourism, here in this region, unlike in north European countries, people are not very conscious and

sensitive towards green policies, and the decisions of politicians and businesses seems to be driven more by financial gain than by a true interest in the environment. I see now that because the environment is trendy politicians show an interest on green policies, and there is a promotion of solar panels.

But I think this is not the right solutions for the hotels in the region since they are seasonal and are open during the summer. For solar panels to be cost-effective you should have the hotel working during the summer, I think it is more energy efficient to close the electricity in October and open it again in May, so that you do not have to pay electricity during the winter. In my view the most important is making sure that construction wise the building are energy efficient (they have good thermal isolation and windows), to have LED light bulbs, and I had also to make changes to the water taps so that there is a specific flow of water per minute, so that there is less water waste. Also, I do recycling, and all the stuff is well informed about what cleaning products they have to use, which are all friendly to the environment.

At the beginning it was difficult to implement all these changes, because of the lack of information and resources in the region. I had to search for the suppliers and to arrange with them how to get the specific products I needed. Even now I need to make special arrangements with the providers so that they bring me what I need. Nobody else in the region uses for instance the specific cleaning products, so I have to make special orders. The same for the windows and the thermic isolation, all had to be custom-made.

I would like to see this investment and change to have results, that is to bring money by attracting more clients that are interested in the environment. I think that if the legislation would enforce green practices that would help to change the culture.

Quotes

I think in this specific region (Halkidiki) there is a lack of appreciation for eco-tourism, here in this region.

At the beginning it was difficult to implement all these changes, because of the lack of information and resources in the region.

Keywords

Eco-tourism, energy-efficient building, financial profit,

RL4_GR04, Greece, Social and environmental business



Narrative

I am a 47-year-old woman from a village outside Thessaloniki who lives now in Ano Poli (Thessaloniki), and I work for about 16 years in an environmental organism “Management Body of Axios Deltas Loudias-Aliakmonas”, so I was always very sensitive about environmental issues, that is I am very interested in protecting the natural environment, and the protection of species and biodiversity, climate change, but also I am interested on cities where there are many things that need to be done with regard to the environment, such as waste, contamination, misuse of water and many others.

In 2019, together with four other people I started a small social cooperative business, which has as a purpose to do actions in nature, that is actions that bring people, in particular families and children, in contact with nature. The business actually started to function in 2020 because of the difficulties faced during the Covid pandemic in 2019. From the 5 member, three of us are more active, and now we have an additional person, sent by the British Council, who is doing an internship for 3 months. We have not managed to develop and hire people due to lack of capital and investments. When you start a business and want to develop you need money and time. We need a website, accountant, and when there is not an initial capital or financial support this is very difficult. Since I cannot have an income from this business I need to keep my basic job that I mentioned above, and the other two women who are also more active also have the same problem. So I do not have the time to support the business and so you cannot develop as you would like. It is very difficult when you do not have the capital for a business plan and for starting a business and so you do what you have with what you have. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic was also very difficult to do our actions and to function. Our first actions were assigned by Ergani, a centre that support entrepreneur women in Sikies, which no longer exists. This was a programme by Ergani called “family share” so it was relevant to our aim, which is as I said focused on families and children. Now we run with the municipality of Neapolis-Sikeon, with the cultural neighbourhood, workshops on “zero waste”, and other actions such as “Sundays on Alsos”. That is, the Municipality wanted to bring people living in the municipality and beyond in contact with the historical garden and natural environment which is very close to the city, which is not well known by people, so we organised activities there such as planting trees. We have contract with the social services of the municipality of Neapolis-Sikeon and run different activities to reduce the environmental footprint. We do workshops about recycling and upcycling of materials for construction, the production of organic waste with products that can be found at home. Our main tool is education. When we do an action we try to avoid buying plastic materials, for instance if we are doing play activities with children we do not buy balloons. We try to use only natural materials. The problem is that we do not have a physical location for the business, we do not have equipment, so we do not have issues with management of paper or waste. Of course if at some point we manage to have a physical location for the business, we will implement practices to use the minimum amount of resources, that is I do not think the issue is how you manage the things you have/buy, but the issue is to use as few resources as you can. For mobility and transport issues, internal and for the activities, as I said we do not have a physical location so we do meeting in our homes, and since it happens that all live close to each other we do not need to use car. We have thought about how we can deal with this issue in our actions/activities, for instance we organise activities in Chortiatis (a mountain village), and we have a meeting time with all

the families at the village, where there is a place you can park the cars before you enter the walking path. The right thing would be to organise it differently so they do not use the cars, or leave them further away from the natural environment but it would not be sustainable for the business. Since we have an issue with the business financial sustainability you need to balance this issue, since we do not have the money. We want to develop, for instance we would like to get involved with schools, and to work with any Municipality that is interested on the environment, and have reached out to some municipalities (Delta, Thermaikou) but nothing has come out from the meeting. To end I would like to say, that from the moment I started this job, I saw the world in a different way, and moved from a self-centred philosophy of life, to a perspective of the world united, we are all part of this world, and we do not have the right as humans to see the world around us as something that can be used for our own benefit.

Quotes

Of course, when you face issues with surviving [meaning sustainability of the business], somehow you have to weight things, such as if you can afford to put the extra money or if this would mean a problem for the business. This is true also for our everyday life.

We want to develop, of course. One aspect we want to chase now is schools...our goal is to work with any municipality, such the Municipality of Delta, if they want to collaborate, we have made some attempts with the Municipality of Thermaikou, but I do not see anything happening. The dimension that we add on the sustainability issue is that our actions have as goal to benefit people through their contact with nature...but at the same time to pass to them a message of the need of protecting the environment...that is to create environmental sensitivity...

Keywords

Environmental consciousness, social purpose, families, children, education

RL4_GR05, Greece, Significant relationships

Narrative

I am a 54-year-old woman from Stavroupoli (Thessaloniki) with 3 children, who are now studying at the University. Ten years ago, together with my husband, we started a wood workshop business in Stavroupoli which currently employs 4 people on full-time bases

and sometimes temporary people depending on the seasonal work demands. One of the factors that facilitated creating the business was that we owned the building where the workshop is, so it means that we had less expenses to run the business.

In the last year, due to laws and external pressures, but also due to a change in mentality we have tried to adopt and implement energy saving and environmental friendly practices in our business. We have changed all the light bulbs to LED. We only try to use products from Greek producers, for instance we buy all our wood from a city close to Thessaloniki (Xanthi) so that we reduce as much as we can our carbon footprint relating to transport. In relation to transport we would like to further reduce our impact by reducing further our routes with transport companies, and by also reducing our work related trips for trade fairs and exhibitions. Specifically, we are thinking to do trading through our online site, so that we reduce the cost associated with attending fairs and exhibitions and at the same time with reduce the negative impact of travelling to the environment. We also use only ecological products for the wood (e.g., paintings and brushes) although they more expensive. In terms of energy saving practices, we would like to adopt several measures but we do not have the money, and cannot get support from the government because we do not fit the pre-requisites. For instance, for some time we are trying to replace all our electrical heaters, that is replace the A/C systems we have with new inverter models of a higher energy class that have a better performance. We also would like to make changes to the building so that we do not have so much energy loss, for instance we have problems with the roof and the windows but we do not have money to make these changes.

In my attitude towards environmental practices I have been greatly influenced by another woman co-worker who is very interested and active on environmental issues, and she has managed to motivate us and activate us on these issues. I have also been greatly influenced by my children, who are part of the new generation, which is more aware and sensitive to environmental issues that our generation and my parent generation. I think in general nowadays there is a general there is a greater interest towards the environment, and so my generation is trying to adjust and move towards this direction.

“Look, there are for sure personal beliefs regarding the environment, but generally there is a dominant movement lately in our society towards the environment and sustainability, therefore we try to be typical in those things that are basically imposed. Of course, imposed for a good cause, but we want to be ready for any kind of related change in the future.” “Now, to be honest I was not influenced by parents [when it comes to environmentally sustainable practices], but for sure I have been influenced by my children, who are children of a new generation that is more sensitive and conscious about the environment that we were, and so I have been very much influenced by them.” I do not have the knowledge and information, but I believe that if you want to get informed and educated on environmental issues there will be for sure a way to do it. I know that there are programmes in Greece, and we have already made applications to get financial support from the government to improve the energy efficiency of our business but unfortunately we do not meet the pre-requisites to be eligible. Therefore it is not always feasible to make changes even if you want so.

Quotes



To be honest, initially the main focus of the business was the money, we tried at the beginning, that is we were interested in surviving with as lower cost (expenses) as we could. With time, and realising that there are other needs in our society we decided to as much as we can within our financial possibilities, to improve the situation.

Keywords

Change in attitude, family interaction, new generation, external pressures, obligations

RL4_GR06, GREECE, New generation with strong values

Narrative

I am a 24-year-old man from Thessaloniki, and together with my partner started a small business one year ago to sell home-made candles, and other products from wax, such as aromatic products for the car and closets. I was always very conscious about and care for the environment and tried to do as much as I could in my everyday life to have a positive impact, such as recycling. Thus, when I decided to start a business I had very clear that I would not do anything that would aggravate the current situation with our planet, and that the same values I had in my personal life regarding the environment would guide my business. My partner has also the same ideology, so it worked well. We could do the same business and product with a great quality in a non-sustainable way, but for me it was more important to do something that will have a smaller carbon footprint that to make more money or sell to a greater market. And this is not always easy, because clients do not always appreciate that doing ecological products that respect the environment are more expensive, and so many times our products are not appreciated by potential clients who are more interested in the cost than in the environmental impact of the product.

In terms of my business, I (we) only use natural products, soya wax, because paraffin in addition to being a cancerogenic substance, as I learned is also derived from petrol, which is a problem for the environment. Also, instead of using cotton wicks for the candle we use wicks made from wood, because the cotton ones are also soaked in paraffin. We also try to avoid using plastic in our packaging, that is we use only glass, carton, metal or paper. But sometimes is difficult to keep a balance between using more sustainable products and ensuring the quality, for instance that the product will not be broken during transportation.

We try to use only glass containers for the candles, so that the client once the candle is finished can re-use it to store jam or other things. We wanted to make the candle containers returnable (so that we re-use it for a new candle), but we have not managed to

find a way to this in an economical and sustainable way, I do not know yet how to do this. That is in terms of transport how to do this so the client gets a discount and can return it to us. So we lack of technical knowledge to implement some of our ideas. Also I read recently in one research that glass may not be after all the most sustainable material because it is very heavy and so its transport has more carbon emission. So I am troubled by this information and we need possibly to re-consider what materials we use.

Recently we realised that we were wasting some of the raw materials (the wick made from wood), and that we can use it more efficiently so that it is not wasted at all. We have been doing this for two months now and it works well.

Finally, when it comes to energy, this is mainly relevant to our business when it comes to actually doing the candle, that is the wax has to be melted at a certain temperature. At the moment I am using my kitchen at home, but there is specialised equipment to do this, actually we have one but have not used yet because we do not have yet the demand needed to make its use efficient. Although to be honest, I do not know if using this specialised equipment would make the business more energy efficient. I think as a society now we are more sustainable in our values...I cannot tell if this is due to education, to the internet but I believe that our society has done progress on this domain, and society and social media in particular play a role in putting pressure to businesses for instance that do not have an environmental philosophy, and so many businesses to avoid being criticised in social media they take measures in relation to the environment. I think that social media hold business and people accountable in relation to the environment, it supports a society with a common purpose.

Quotes

The truth is that during the summer we had the possibility of doing decorations for big events (wedding, christening), and as you understand we are talking about big quantities, 200-300 pieces, and people when they order big quantities they think about small increases in price, that is 2 € added cost per item is a big amount when you multiply it by 200. And so although many clients agreed with our environmental philosophy and told that when it comes to their everyday life they also use natural and re-usable products, they wanted us to make an exception (not to use soya wax but paraffin) because this was for a big order and the cost of using a natural product would be very high; and so unfortunately we had to turn down the job and tell them that this is not our philosophy...

Keywords

New generation, social media, eco-philosophy, strong values

RL4_GR07, Greece, A strong community with shared values

Narrative

I am a 40-year-old woman, and together with another four friends, whom I met by chance in my previous work, and with whom I shared a common ideology, founded a small business cooperative with a clear community and social purpose. The coffee place is located in a neighbourhood of Thessaloniki city centre, and at the core of our philosophy is to keep the prices of our products as low as we can so that it is accessible to everybody. I am not interested in making as much profit as I can but I am interested in supporting the community so I just need to have enough money for living and to make the business sustainable.

I feel part of a team/group that has a bigger (social purpose), and I share a common purpose with a small society/community. I feel that my business has created a small society of people who share the same values with our business. The fact that the business is a cooperative has some limitations (e.g., number of employees, who can work) but the advantage of being able to make a social work.

For instance, we did an action about “getting to know the pomegranate” so that people could learn about the benefits of eating this fruit, and through this and other projects we collaborate with small business and cooperative to sell local products with our label (e.g., jam). Our actions all have an environmental and educational character. It is important that what I do, as part of my job as well, is not just a task but it becomes an experience, a way of living so that I do this purposely and consciously not because it is a task I have to do or because I can benefit economically from it. When I started this project, five years ago, this was a very new idea in Greece. It was a very personal project, developed with little money, and with a lot of personal investment. The project was inspired by my (our) interests/concerns about the environment and art. And as a positive project that would inspire others.

The location (the particular city centre neighbourhood) did not facilitate the project, since there was nothing happening when we started, and it took a lot of time to open the business because there were many obstacles and resistance from the local church, who distrusted the purpose of the business. Now things have changed, the coffee place has been embraced by the people, other businesses have come to the neighbourhood (e.g., a restaurant, a tattoo and a barber shop) so now the neighbourhood is alive and there is a community that has facilitated change in relation as well to sustainable practices.

“For instance, the grocery in the neighbourhood from where I get products for the business used to bring them in a plastic bag, and I used to go to the shop and tell them please leave the bag and I will take them in my hand. Now they have paper bags...so there was a change...it could be that other 10 people after me said the same thing to them...but there is change” Being part of this business has also changed the way I behave in relation to the environment, since I started to take the products from local and small cooperatives used in the business for my house, and I am more careful with my food choices in the super-market, since I learned from the business but also from the providers

and even from my clients. Our generation has a sustainable practice consciousness, so for us as a business is natural to think about adopting as many sustainable practices in our business as we can. There is an strong willingness... "It is very important to not produce plastic waste knowing that when I die the plastic will be still there in two generation time. I think the new generation has already this mentality, it is nice." From the beginning of the business we tried to use only recyclable products, although this is hindered by the lack of infrastructure, since there are no recycling bins close to us. At the beginning we used to carry to other places all the glass and plastic produced by the business but when the waste started to increase this was very difficult. We recycle our used coffee, which becomes fuel, we support local and small producers/providers, we give free food to people in need, organise educational trips in the nature, and educational seminars about the environment, and we have a group of followers. We try to have only Greek products, for instance our beer is only from Greek producers, so we reduce our carbon footprint, although the problem with Greek beer producers is that the bottles are not returnable so it means that we produce a lot of bottle waste. So what I do is to take the bottles home because close to my house there is machine that breaks the glass for recycling. We used to have plastic and aluminium packaging for take away and now we have only carton, but the problem is that this is not very suitable for our products because they are wet. We have also changed our cups so that we do not have plastic at all, although it is very expensive.

I think the main problem is the lack of infrastructure and organisation from the municipality and the state. The new generation is trying very hard to change and adopt sustainable practices, but it has to with the State, money is not the only problem you can find ways to deal with it, but if there is no infrastructure or mechanisms to for instance actually do recycling there is nothing you can do about it.

Quotes

We have called the municipality and they said that the recycling track cannot get into the street because it is too narrow, and that is why there are no recycling bins in the street. They say that there are in a nearby street. So I should at night when I close the business to carry the garbage to nearby street...

For instance, the grocery in the neighbourhood from where I get products for the business used to bring them in a plastic bag, and I used to go to the shop and tell them please leave the bag and I will take then in my hand. Now they have paper bags...so there was a change...it could be that other 10 people after me said the same thing to them...but there is change.

With the electricity, because our heating system is with electricity, this year we bought small heaters that work with gas bottles, to save energy and money. In the area we are, because there is an important monument, we cannot install A/C (AC boxes in the façade are forbidden), also as a business you cannot get permit for gas energy in this area...so the only solution we could find was to use heater with electricity inside the premises but this is expensive...so I do not know how you can reduce your carbon footprint in the City

centre as a business...this year we decided to buy small heater that work with gas bottles to see if we can reduce the electricity consumption.

Keywords

Community, interaction, social responsibility, learning, education, new generation

RL4_GR08, Greece, Ethical family business

Narrative

I am a 45-year-old single mother with two children who are 6 and 12 years old, and I live in a rural area of Greece although I am originally from Athens. I have worked in different places (countries) and jobs, but at some point I decided to take over my parent's business because I like the quality of life that you can get from living in a rural area, and because I thought this was a great opportunity to put into practice my thoughts and ideas about sustainability. I got inspiration for some of these ideas while I was living in Austria 15 years ago, when in Greece there was little or nothing going on about sustainability. The business is a hotel that started in 1996. When I was studying at the University, it was a conflictive time in the Greece society with immigrants, and this inspired me to do search during my studies about two issues, racism (fear to immigrants) and ethical investment. I was inspired then by a very well-known beauty products company that started then a conversation about recycling and re-using and not using animal testing, which was then something "exotic" in Greece. Once I finished my studies I follow this motivation and did volunteering work in two NGOs, Citizen Adovate and Antigoni, which was focused on racism and ecology, and was closely related to one of the main leaders on the ecological movement in Thessaloniki. I was also very inspired by the model of small family business in other European countries that they could do well by doing business in an ethical way. While I was looking however for job elsewhere, during the summer I helped my parents with the business and suddenly I got really excited about how many things I could do, and so I decided to run full-time the hotel. Because I thought it was the right time to make a change in Greece. The first thing I did in 2006 is to make the breakfast with ecological products, at that point supermarkets in Greece did not have ecological products, and there was only one provider (shop) with biological products in the area. There was another one but with German products, and for me it was important to be ecological but also locally produced. I decided to use everything, event salt, from ecological origin so that was a huge cost for the business, and I am not sure that the effort (investment) had any impact...but it did help I think with the marketing via social media, since I started to make a lot of pots about sustainability. I was then contacted by newspapers and other communication media and was asked to write articles on the matter. After, I did an

initiative with bicycling, and made an offer to a weekend without cars so that people would come with bicycles. Then, in 2006-2008 I wanted to obtain the European ECO, I searched information and saw that there was an educational/training meeting in Crete, so I took an airplane to attend the event. There I realised that all this movement with the ECO label was driven by one big Hotel in Greece that was part of a Scandinavian company. I eventually obtained the ECO label in 2008, and renewed it a second time, but I realised that this was not appreciated by the clients, and that there was no interest and so I did not renew it anymore. One of the problems is that there is no infrastructure or organisation to support sustainable practices in Greece, for instance even to buy simple things like recycle paper you need to search a lot for providers. Now in Greece if you want to buy a product you can find an “ecological” version of it, but in reality this is not true. I think now we are on the opposite end of not having a green culture/infrastructure to having the ultimate Greenwashing. In general, although it is now easier to find ecological products, I do not believe there has been a real change in Greece when it comes to sustainability. For instance, in my rural area there is not support or infrastructure in terms of recycling, there is only one blue recycling bin for everything, and no facilities for recycling organic waste. There is also a problem with providers and transport for organic farming, which are not organised to supply business like mine. So I would need to drive 40 kilometres and to different places to buy different vegetables organically produced. I think that travellers (client) don't care if I have solar panels or other kind of green practices relating to energy, but I see they are very interested and appreciate whatever it has to do with food. So I have given priority and focus to the food. That is to have only locally produced and healthy food, and plant-based foods, actually the hotel serves only vegetarian food, which is somehow a radical decision for Greece. I have many times Greek families staying in the hotel, where the woman says that she has no problem with eating only vegetarian food...but the man (the father of the family) does have a problem...I do not see this gender distinction with foreigners.

I do not think there is yet an ecological/sustainable consciousness in Greece. For instance, just now they are discussing about a plan for reducing food waste in big hotels, which I think it should have been done a long time ago. From a business model point of view, my sustainable practices do not pay off, as they have a bigger cost than the price I can charge per room in this region, however I am a small family business I my main interest is not making a bigger profit but doing what I think is right. Money is a big issue, especially in Greece where sustainable technologies and products are more expensive than in other European countries. There are some financial support programmes from the government, I have benefited from those but there is too much paperwork, which makes things very difficult.

Quotes

What I find in particular problematic is that the accreditation and policies for fighting against real environmental problems, in practice and structurally have to do with big businesses. And then they realise that we, small business, who are not contributing to the problem or the situation with the environment, after all are paying the cost and burden associated to this problem. For instance, they asked us to check three times a day the fridge's temperature...I have one fridge which we open to see if it has frost or not! I understand

that this procedure of checking the fridge is important for big business that have 100 thousand fridges but I do not understand why do I have to implement this policy! And to waste the time of my few employees, and to pay for things that we do not need with the little money I make...something has to be done...those up there could think that it is very different to have a business with 30 thousand employees and to have one with five employees...and so different polices should be implemented for big and small businesses.

Having a sustainable business for me is a must and I cannot do it otherwise. Not doing it would be unethical. To go and buy food product from big supermarkets and serve them to my clients is something I cannot simply do, so in that sense it is effortless. This has consequences for my potential clients, since they tell me if you do not have meet we are not coming. In that sense it has a (negative) impact, but honestly deep inside me I do not believe I am doing it wrong, because it is not in conflict with what has to be done now...for me it is a manifest in some way...I want to make a point that 1) it has to be done and 2) you can do it and survive as a business...

Keywords

Ethics, family, sustainable food, geographical rural region

RL4_GR09, Greece, Ethically driven eco-business

Narrative

I am a 37-year-old woman who lives in Pilea, and mother of two 6 years old girls. I always had as a philosophy to do things with a purpose. And so I wanted to create something not just to make money, but something that could set an example for others, and something that has to do with ecological products. Then there was the Covid pandemic and the quarantine, and because I have health problems I had to be at home and had a lot of time to think what I wanted to do. Since I could not continue with my everyday life, and decide to put in motion this project that I have thinking about for a long time. The e-shop business sells ecological hair brushes, which are made from waste. Basically, when a coconut is open the fibres from the outer shell are thrown away, and so in certain countries where they have coconuts they make the brushes from scratch. I made a big import of these brushes' expensive product. The konjac is basically a root that is turned into a mash that is suitable for the body and face skin. Once you use, you can through it away and because it is a 100% naturally is biodegradable. So I started a business with these products. Then I started to produce candles, and I had to look for pure certified soya,

because all our products are certified and specify their origin, etc. All this process helped me to understand what I can do. It is very different to work as an employ from being a business woman and having all the stress of managing the business. And so this is how I started the business with a lot love and care, and we aimed at having zero waste, to use non-toxic for the environment products, which of course makes the products expensive. Beside some of the raw materials than we import, all the other production materials are from Greek producers and businesses, so the production of the products takes place in Greece, and a percentage of our sales is given to philanthropic associations such as Alma Zois, so I believe that we support sustainability for packaging. We are also plastic-free and chemical free, even the ink that we use is soya-based. Even the paper we use we do not throw it away, we shredder it and using for packaging, even our packaging tape is ecological. These have a high cost, but our waste is a 100% biodegradable, and since we have 100 orders per month, I think that details like this make a significant impact. We thought that people that believe in sustainability would embrace our efforts and support our products, but this is not happening, at least not to the extent we wanted. We want our products to have an ethical and educational purpose, so for our soaps we have what we call “Honouring Women”, that is we write a small story for a woman of the past. F instance we have written about Ariadni, a woman that was feared and was powerful, and the stories relate to things that still happen in our society, so that is the reason we do it. We want to make an impact in the society, and I am very proud about what I do, my business. The problem is that the expenses for this type of business are too high, and we do not get support from the government for instance to be plastic-free. And this is very difficult for instance for our delivery, in Greece there are not alternatives for plastic-free delivery, so we have to find creative ways to deliver our products without using plastic. I want to believe that my generation wants to support Greek products of high quality that are sustainable and to pay the extra money, but I see that they look for bargains, and are not so much interested in quality and sustainability. What people don't understand is that in the long run sustainable products are more economical because they last for longer and also do good to the environment. Despite that, we are not going to change our brand and philosophy. But I would like to get more recognition and support for our efforts, for instance for using only certified materials. But unfortunately only big business get support, although small business can play a big role in change as well. I believe that people in Greece do not have the social consciousness that you can find in other countries. They say that they support small business but I believe that the business is small or big what matters is the purpose and the philosophy behind the business. I have much more appreciation from foreign customers who write me really nice messages than from Greek customers. For the future, I would like to find other business people that share the same values with me, I have found one woman that with her own money makes sustainable tools from Greek products and also teaches others. So I would like in the future to get more into the creative aspects of the business, and to make a community of people to do nice things together that have an impact on the society. But money is a big problem, and Greece is going through a financial crisis.

Quotes



I believe that when you are good professional, you have the need to give back. At least this is how I think as a professional. Not everything is about money, or about being famous. I believe that it comes a time when you want to do something with your heart. I want to do a e-shop that represents who I am, and that makes me happy.

Unfortunately only big business get support...but small business can play a role as well. Veganism started from a small movement, and suddenly everybody reduced meat consumption. Something small can become something very big. So people have to commit that if they want to buy sustainable products they must pay maybe double in relation to a product that is made from plastic.

Keywords

Ethics, social consciousness, eco-values, sustainable products, zero waste

RL4_GR10, Greece, Family driven ecological values

Narrative

I am a 43-year-old woman living in Thessaloniki, and mother of two adolescents, I have a background in language and education, and teach English and Greek language to children and adults since I was 19 years old. I belong to a generation that did not grow up in the “green” culture, for me it is something new, I first heard the word “green energy” maybe 7-8 years ago, and learned about the word “recycling” when I was in high school. Then in my neighbourhood there weren’t recycling bins, so in my house we have bags of different colours to separate the waste. My parents were very serious about recycling because they grew up in a village, so recycling was part of their lives, they used waste to feed animals, organic waste not suitable for animals was made compost, and so they tried to have as less waste as they could. And so once they moved to the City, as a family we had this philosophy although we could not implement this in the city. But still they found ways to be sustainable, so I used to wear second hand cloth from my cousins, it was unthinkable in my family to wear something for some months and then throw it away. Although I can read in the English books that I use for teaching a lot about “Green” and about “the three R’s”, in Greece there is not yet a culture about reducing the environmental footprint, to reduce buying new cloth, to buy from local producers and to use re-usable bags, etc.

When I met with my partner we share the same vision and passion about traditional dances, and we wanted to do something about traditional dances and change people’s

perceptions on this. We created the business with my partner, when he was on strike for two years against a global company that he worked for. The company eventually closed, and so we decided to create a traditional dances business. I wanted to create a modern business that could be seen as an urban network in Thessaloniki, and that is we chose to have the business in the City centre. In our business, I do not have plastic bags, and I carry the laundry in Green bags, I do not use paper, I have cloth napkins, and wash them. All our appliances are energy-efficient, for instance I use the washing machine only at night and when it is full. For Christmas decorations we do them only with natural materials.

I always try to find sustainable solutions. We only use green lights. When we organise activities, we always use buses so that people don't have to use cars. I would like to do more things in my business, for instance at home, we live outside the city, we have a waste bin for the animals (we have chickens), another for organic compost, and a third for recycling but I can do this because I live 20 kms outside the city. I would like some empty spaces in the city centre of Thessaloniki to have composting bins, why not, for instance this could be easily done in the parks. We are renting the building where we have our business, so I would like the landlord to make changes to make it more energy-efficient, to change the windows and doors, to make the heating system more efficient, there are small things that I think could be done. We made some investment in the building to improve the acoustics, which eventually resulted in a better isolation and less energy loss. But we have not received any external financial support. I think we are a small business and there are very little things we can do, I think the big change needs to come from big businesses.

I believe that as a business owner I have a responsibility, so yes I try, I try to create a culture among the dancers and participants in our events of sustainability, and tell them for instance to bring their own re-usable water bottles and other small things. That is, I try to reduce our environmental footprint. My environmental consciousness is inspired by the actions of my mother. This is the way I was brought up, it is a mentality, and I tried to pass on this mentality to my children as well.

Quotes

We thought that to throw away a piece of cloth that a baby had it for some months is a luxury, so we always recycled our cloth. Even with my cousin when we need to attend an official event we do not buy new cloth but borrow from each other. Now that I teach English books that talk about "Green culture" I understand that all these little things that we did in my family are green practices.

Keywords

Family values, rural living, green practices, recycling, re-usable,

RL4_NO01, Norway, It's not the climate that needs fixing. It's us

Narrative

The respondent. I moved to Norway nine years ago. I have a family here and I have kids. And I found a start-up where I work still today. It's not easy to answer who you are. I guess the question, but a lot of people I guess equalise that question with what they do. So it's yeah. Hi, I'm bogged down and I'm working with sustainability, with climate engagement. That's accurate. That's true. But I also have an environmental background. I have like a double master's degree, one in ecology and environmental biology and the other one in marine biology.

Furthermore, I also worked with theatre, media, and communications. This third element comes from nonformal education methods with lots of NGO's as a trainer. The company. The start-up has been found in 2014. It was a start-up, with 6 employees, created within the university research milieu with the scope of testing hypotheses on motivating and engaging people into climate actions by using different communication strategies. Now, we are 37 people. Our first solution was basically a web app: you only need a browser and inside of this app you would have your profile and you would be invited to join a climate challenge, something we call the "The Challenge". And there you would log a list of everyday climate actions in food, energy, transport, and goods and services. And in return, you would get some behavioural benefits for each activity you would log in, like eating fewer portions of meat or saving your energy, plugging out the cables or how much you are traveling by foot or by bike, and so on. And then you can get additional information on why is this important and so on.

We witnessed things that didn't happen when the start-up was born like the Paris agreement, SDG, like having non-financial reporting and EU mandatory for companies larger than 200 employees, and so on. So a lot of the world was moving in that same trend. Today, we have two more products.

The second one invites customers of our customers to answer a set of questions. Depending on which industrial sector our customer is coming from – so energy, transport, food, or finance – you would get your personal footprints or your summary, like your habits, your lifestyle in a nutshell regarding depending on your answers, and then you would get certain tips on how to be more climate-friendly.

The third product is a map. We have it as a map of Norway at the moment, but it's probably the most detailed climate footprint. Consumption-based footprint map which shows the footprints from the national level to your neighbourhood level. So you could literally zoom in and you can see of course not with the name and surname the footprints of people around you, rather you could see the footprint literally of your street or school district. We have partnerships around climate data, which is constantly updating those climate data, new numbers coming in. Then also we have a partnership with banks. Any consumer is an emitter of CO₂, which means every time you use your bank card, CO₂ emission is to happen and so a lot of banks are interested in this to engage their customers.

The barriers for the company. We struggled and we're still fighting against two types of barriers. The first one is user barriers. These are more linked to psychology: distance, doom and gloom, dissonance, refusal, strong identity. Users sometimes feel as if they are alone, insignificant, and too small, and whatever they do making sense doesn't make any difference. So they want rather just leave their lives as easy as possible. They don't really care about an IT portal on polar bears, because polar bears live far away. Maybe not that far away from Norway.

But we have other barriers as well, which are business barriers. For a long time, what we do was considered nice but not profitable. It was probably due to well combination of a couple of things. Our products have never shown an actual return on investment. You were aware that being more sustainable didn't mean necessarily that you can get X amount of money back. Throughout the years, something has changed. It becomes slowly moving to the mainstream. Companies start to see that sustainability and climate-friendly solutions are a megatrend that it attracts talent, attracts customers' loyalty, it enhances their brand equity.

Something you want to change in the management of your company to make it more environmentally sustainable We need more approaches based on storytelling, emotions, and narratives. I remember the first publication about our app that we ever had in 2014. We were on the top stage of this address service in local newspapers and the title was "An app that shows you how much you pollute". And this was completely the opposite of what we were doing. We were showing how much you can save. We had nothing to do with pollution. But then when we called the editor and the journalist, they said in a perfectly normal voice: "you get more clicks if the title is a bit negative, then people will read it, you know". And we were shocked. We need good storytelling to change narratives, and empower individuals. When you go to the grocery store, you can see products like vegan cheese or Oakley milk. Those products did not exist eight years ago and now they are not there because of some sort of experiment. They are there because somebody demands those products. Storytelling is important for offering CO2 translation. So, let's say you save an amount of CO2 which is 500 kilograms. But it doesn't speak much. Does it drive 500 kilograms? It's a number and this CO2 cannot really see or smell it or touch it. With storytelling, we are able to translate this number into calories or distance, kilometres or kilowatts.

Best opportunities for the company in the future The core of our solution is consumption-based emissions which are quantified, visualised, and turned into a story to create emotions. And I think consumption-based emission is something that comes from consumption, some from spending. Any sector which demands consumption, and those are all that you mentioned (energy, food, mobility, protection of natural areas, disaster management), but even financial ones to start with, which kind of covers them all.

Quotes

Throughout the years, something has changed. It becomes slowly moving to the mainstream. Companies start to see that sustainability and climate-friendly solutions are a megatrend that it attracts talent, attracts customers' loyalty, it enhances their brand equity.

Keywords

Climate changes, psychology, emotions, storytelling, consumption

RL4_NO02, Norway, Sometimes vulnerability is a matter of people's mindset, regardless of their socio-economic status

Narrative

The entrepreneur: I'm in my 30s and my familiar background is from a two-parent household great upbringing, safe environment. I have studied marketing work in 15 years of sales. And then two years ago I started sitcom a company. I am currently running with my good friend and partner, Peter.

The company: It has developed Norway's first self-service warehouse dedicated to the sale of surplus materials directly from the building and construction industry. Here you get cheap goods that are good for the environment According to our analysis, there are three main drivers of cost which are transportation, storage, and administration of reuse materials. If a contractor has a large construction park, or a construction project, the cheapest way for them to get rid of the materials waste is to throw them away and buy new ones when they need them. Because of the timing between projects, because of different material uses in different projects. And the labour cost and storage costs in Norway are much higher than the production cost of new objects. So, they end up throwing them away while they are fully usable. 20% of waste is reusable.

So, we came up with the idea of installing a unit directly on site, where the problem arises. We thought containers were the cheapest solution. They are weather resistant. They are stable but they are also mobile and can be easily rebuilt. So we took two 220-foot containers and integrated them into one unit. And then we thought we had to turn this container into a sort of self-service shop. Indeed, the container has a door controlled by a tablet to verify access by codes. It is also equipped with an electrical system, a fan, some heating. Inside it has shelves so that it can be used to store waste building materials.

Financial restrictions at the beginning At the beginning the concept was at early stage and then we sought out funding from the agency for innovation in Norway. We got around 360,000 Kroners Norwegian in funding to build our first concept container.

Technical changes in business solution to addressing environmental topics The science of material has grown up and changed, discovering new kind of approach, new kind of techniques and, yes, we had a lot of technical changes to arrange, accordingly. We did a pilot funded by Norwegian agency for innovation. And the pilot project wasn't success of course: we had a lot of small difficulties with the container because of the weather in Norway. You have four degrees sun on midday, and you have below 10 degrees on the night-time. This means a lot of maintenance on it because of rust and

debris. As a result, what we did we installed the fan improving the system. We linked the units up to the internet or with 4g routers.

How company matches climate change issues Well, the materials that we collect are basically waste. Basically, all the materials are destined for the landfill if we don't pick them up. They are put into big ovens and burned for fossil fuels. Normally, they are use of heating from unsettled area. They are used for energy. But this implies huge environmental, huge co2 emissions by burning the materials that, alternatively, we can sell. Instead, we issue a sort of environmental product declaration. Something like certification for the life cycle of a product. We analyse a material destined for waste and calculate how much we save in terms of kilos of CO2 emissions if we prevent it from being waste. So what we do is basically save co2 emissions by catching waste before it becomes waste.

Cultural and regulatory barriers. The competitors are a barrier of course, but a lot of the competitor companies don't have a physical object that they can sell or lease out. But the main issue now is a cultural problem of the companies that the materials are being stolen from the construction sites, from the employees that take them, take them home. And they always take the best materials home first. And when we get called at the end of the project, it's not a lot of materials left. So that's one of the issues. And in Norway, this is illegal. As an employer of a construction firm, you can't take the materials home with you. It's tax fraud actually, in Norway, so that is a big problem. In the building construction industry there is a widespread lack of culture about the commercial and environmental value of waste materials. This is a big limit both for us and for the environment Today we have generic and not-contextual taxonomy that forces all the value chain to make decisions that companies then fail to satisfy. And this creates tensions and turmoil in the sector. If the tensions become too much, companies begin to circumvent the laws. This is a real risk in the construction sector. My key argument here is that you need to transform the reuse of materials and the reduction of CO2 emissions into an economy that is so circular that it benefits everyone, including the construction sector. If the laws end up cutting their margins, big companies won't. It's that simple. The solutions must have an amazing impact on the environment, but they must also be made profitable for companies with ad hoc political decisions. If they really intend to implement sustainable solutions.

Quotes

We have developed Norway's first self-service warehouse dedicated to the sale of surplus materials directly from the building and construction industry. Here you get cheap goods that are good for the environment.

Keywords

Small company, materials, construction industry, Norway, solution, reuse, competence, unit, industry, contractor, barriers, built, demands, climate change

RL4_NO03, Norway, Blaise's approach? Agriculture as a means of the inclusion of refugees

Narrative

I am from Scotland. I grew up mostly in Scotland but also in Canada, with dual nationality. My background is varied. At University I studied psychology and Communication for my undergraduate master I did the income from psychology and started down the route of becoming a clinical psychologist and worked as an assistant psychologist for two years. Just to find it wasn't my job. I was too interested in physical activity and too interested in climate change actually. I left there the health service and worked as a volunteer for six months doing conservation volunteering in Scotland, to do with keep working with communities, working with vulnerable groups, and trying to create community engagement around the local environment. I did that as a volunteer, then I got a job in another charity, which was about energy efficiency, energy efficiency was there for about fuel poverty, so people that can't afford to heat their homes. And after a year I went to another charity, which was about conservation volunteering. So, it's my second charity job. And then after that, after four years, I set up my own charity in Scotland, which I ran for 11 years, which was about, I guess, where people and the planet meet, that is focused on forests because Scotland is a very deforested country. In other words, we used forest and forest creation and forest management as a forum for working with people on a range of issues, often mental health and not just mental health, trying to get people into the forest or into the natural landscape to get their hands dirty. And when their hands are dirty, and they're doing something talking to them about climate change and what they can do to change. At some point, I decided to move to Norway. Basically, I don't know why. Frustration, boredom, Scotland that not becoming an independent nation. My job had become very office based because I was the manager of 10 staff. It wasn't easy at first. There was no real social enterprise practice in Norway and the charity sector was not great. Even explaining my CV was difficult.

Furthermore, in Scotland was a huge gap between the rich and poor. And compared to Norway, when I came here, I felt like I don't actually have the same desire to help people. And then after a couple of years, I met a farmer in Norway, who became a friend, and we started thinking about the condition of the refugees. For me, those who run away from their own country experience a situation that is directly or indirectly linked to climate change, a bond that is destined to grow and become a condition of our time. Wars and conflicts often have to do with the scarcity of natural resources. Those who are being most significantly affected, tend to be those who are more vulnerable in the world. So, we started in the year 2020 working with refugees, 10 people at the beginning, with the project of cultivating the land, producing vegetables, and selling them. Working the land with pro-environmental and non-industrial approaches to (a) allow refugees to work and therefore integrate into the city texture, (b) learn the language, often a real social barrier, (c) contribute to improving our ecological footprint. Our approach. Often the people who

come to us have very low levels of education. They barely know how to read and write. Imagine how difficult it is then to integrate into a digitised society like Norway. And so we work with them out in the field and use that as a forum for getting him / her to talk. The dimension of work in the field is in fact much less intimidating than a classroom. This is the model. We portrayed ourselves in this room (current seat of the café, Editor's note) and so we thought it could turn into a café, a window to transform our products and see them, but also to sell the products of other manufacturers. This entrepreneurial dimension has made progress for users, also enabling them to get paid work. In 2021 we opened the café. Every year we take 10 people with us to work between fields and coffee.

Quotes

I believe the climate challenges are one of the biggest challenges of our time and want to work on these challenges at a local level. I like to work where people and the planet meet, preferably outdoors and get a little muddy in the process.

Keywords

People, farm, climate change, Norway, Scotland, cafe, vegetables, refugees, energy, carbon, change, years,

RL4_NO04, Norway, Taking care of the things clients already have instead of just throwing it away

Narrative

I've been living in Trondheim since 2007. I moved here with my girlfriend at the time. Now I'm married with two lovely daughters who are five and two years almost. I did not do university studies. I finished high school and then I started working. (Interviewer's note: The subject when asked about his educational level, has an almost ashamed / embarrassed reaction to saying that he is not a graduate yet is dealing with technical issues) Started working with it in this branch in in 2007 with a company that operates in products within office furniture, school furniture, stuff like that mainly. In 2017 the company I was working for was sold and in 2019 the owners of the previous company started the new company. It supplies a range of services related to the relocation of businesses, furniture assembly and disposal of inventory. The company has a strong focus on the

environment and works actively to optimise waste treatment, reuse rate and recycling rate of fixtures and materials via our services. Our services have a lot to do with eco-friendly approaches as well as circular economy. This is a list of our main service: Disposal of inventory - project management and implementation; Recycle old inventory into new products; Cabling of workplaces; Sort sources and document distribution to fractions; Prepare a sustainability report on the project; Relocation of businesses / Moving services; Disassembly / reassembly of used fixtures; Installation of office furniture and auditoriums We collect inventory for recycling, reuse and recycling. Via our newly developed system for recycling wood, we can offer a service that is completely unique and that provides a very high recycling rate for the inventory that is delivered. Size of the company: Today we are in Trondheim with five employees, and we have one employee in in Oslo. Most consistent barriers? In our case it deals with cultural and educational barriers. Uh, you have a carpenter education and just a kind of approach like ours would be very useful for your trade, but sadly you are often not fully aware of it. Green solutions are often seen as naïve, or expensive or ineffective. The value of certain models of economy – such as recycling – are not yet taught in a systematic way. This not only in citizens, but above all in those who do business. This lack of training, of propensity for green and sustainable solutions for the environment creates a strong vulnerability in us. In fact, we sometimes get the feeling that people don't take you so seriously as if you were an engineer, an electrician, and so on. Perhaps we need to improve to address this vulnerability. For example, in the way we look for our customers, in the way we create our first contacts, a greater selection. It is not easy because to do this we would need more data, for example. As we grow up, we hope to improve this aspect. Support from local authorities? With the COVID 19 pandemic, our business services were interrupted overnight. We have sought help from the authorities to make up for the payment of salaries, but we have not received anything. Norway is not a very supportive country in this, especially if you are a young company. They require guarantees that only marketable companies can afford. Like at least 5 years of previous contacts that a 3-year-old company like ours doesn't have. In this way, we are not free to make competitive commercial offers compared to larger and more traditional companies. This is a barrier that makes small businesses, especially innovative ones, which are already suffering a gap within society still not fully ready for certain types of approaches, even more vulnerable.

Quotes

Our mission? To take care of the things clients already have instead of just throwing it and then buying in new stuff.

Keywords

Eco materials, recycling, disposal of furniture and fixtures, waste treatment, circular economy, sustainability

RL4_NO05, Norway, Otto and his love for coffee: a small sustainable roastery and the best espresso in the city

Narrative

Who I am? I have a background in petroleum engineering and I'm a father of four children.

As a first job, I do analysis in drilling and petroleum. For this reason, I have travelled extensively in Europe and around the world. While traveling I discovered and appreciated the coffee culture and so I decided to open my own, quite particular and unique. I import coffee from different parts of the world, trying to look at quality but also at sustainability, plus I have a small roasting laboratory.

The relationship between my business and climate change. Whatever blend you put in your coffee, is affected by the consequences of climate change, starting with the harvest. This is obvious and is also one of the reasons for the fluctuating dynamics of the coffee price. However, I do not agree with placing all the blame on climate and environmental issues. I would start with the centrality of the individual. We are all responsible and everyone should think about what they do to mitigate their environmental footprint. In fact, if I think about my role as a petrochemical engineer, I should think about my responsibilities toward the environment, because we favour the extraction and commercialization of limited natural resources. However, this is true up to a certain point in my case. Since my company and I are involved in doing fundamental analyses to guarantee safety in drilling and petroleum. So, we impact indirectly, but at the same time, we ensure security. As a person, I have travelled extensively around the world in the past. When I think about this, I tell myself maybe I could have travelled less. Many issues could be resolved with a phone call. But those were different times. Nobody cared about the ecological footprint. The system worked like this.

Even in the commercial activity of the bar, the crisis we are experiencing, partly linked to environmental issues, is not having serious consequences. We are a café and not a restaurant. Rising commodity prices and the growing economic vulnerability of families have had consequences for restaurants. For coffee, however, it is different. However much you may spend on living, there is always money to drink a coffee and spend time relaxing.

Then we have an advantage because our management helps us. I try not to buy all the things I need. For the furnishing of the cafe, I recovered used materials, also not neglecting certain cultural attention to respect for the architecture of the past in this neighbourhood. The chandeliers, the furnishings, and all the objects you see are the result of a choice of reuse and enhancement of the history of this district of the city. And, most importantly, we roast the coffee here in the laboratory. So basically, we are an eco-sustainable company but not so much for a moral issue, but rather because we have

given ourselves a method, a system. Then we adopt a price containment policy. The price of espresso is among the lowest in the city. For example, we don't charge extra if you want to have an oat latte of your coffee. Many bars charge you 30% more.

Help from local locations We do not receive any financial help for the bar activity. We are such a small company and, actually, we don't even have a huge cost for electricity consumption. So I honestly don't think there are many other things the government could do for us. Also, I think it's not entirely fair to support all businesses simply because they're small. This sets up a non-virtuous spiral. In the end, as a society, we end up supporting any commercial reality that cannot support itself, that does not contribute by itself to find a way to survive. In other words, we end up supporting what is not sustainable.

Are people really ready to change their behaviour to better respond to the challenges of climate change? In my experience, I'd say people are immediately prompted to say "yes." We all care about the environment, but when it comes to making choices, whose consequences fall on ourselves, then we are a little less willing. The issue of climate change is becoming counterproductive for changing our behaviours. Everyone talks about it and so it's almost becoming a scapegoat: we don't do more than absolutely necessary and blame it on climate change and, in the meantime, we continue to waste, go on vacation to exotic places, have double and triple houses. Authorities should stop us all and check what our real ecological footprint is. But to do that, we should all be more honest about how much we pollute the world, and I don't think people are completely honest about that. We say what suits us, that sounds politically correct. I think this is a really important issue that stands between pro-environment behavioural change and the brakes within it Politics should study our consumer behaviour and impose rules that allow us a more sustainable use of resources, to help us make better choices. Think of the case of COVID. We haven't taken a plane for a long time. One could think about how to rationalise the air system but as soon as the lockdowns ended, everyone went back to flying and going on vacation. Investments should also go in that direction. Improving sustainable agriculture, and energy efficiency. This must be done from a global perspective. How do we improve the living standards of those poor countries if we also want to cut energy consumption in the meantime? The improvement of the quality of life of the populations of the world is connected to the energetic discourse

Quotes

We have tried to create an unpretentious, rustic atmosphere where everyone should feel welcome, be generous and receptive to others. Fraternity is part of the idea and goal behind our café.

Keywords

Energy, climate change, coffee shop, environment, intrapreneur, local authority, invest, sustainable support

RL4_NO06, Norway, Our bar is a social and participation space

Narrative

I am one of the three owners of a pub. My personal story is very intertwined with the history of the pub, but above all with the history of the entire neighbourhood. It all begins during the years of my university education, which was actually a pretext for me to get out of the hell of small provincial realities and be able to travel. I come from a small southern village. While I was at university I came into contact with an environmental organisation and, from here, I began to frequent the world of youth homes out of necessity. As mentioned, I came from the provinces and my parents didn't have enough money to be able to rent my own apartment. So I started to get interested in housing issues, and how they impact people's lives. With other people, we started traveling to visit other countries, especially Scandinavians, and understand how things worked there, and what their housing policies were so that we could then go back to Norway and try to change things. Back in Norway, we settled here, first with an attempt to occupy houses in the other neighbourhood and then, when they evicted us, we came here. So, in 1990, the residents' association was founded with the aim of preserving the houses and fighting for cheap, central housing. Among other things, the residents' association wants to promote unity, creativity, counterculture, hard work, community, ecology, art, culture, and tolerance.

But it wasn't easy. It took considerable political work and collective participation. Anarchists, artists, and creatives, but also unemployed, and underemployed. Various vulnerable groups along with politicised groups. We have adopted an internal organisation based on consent and voluntary participation. We have divided the neighbourhood into smaller areas and for each area, we elect representatives who act as spokespersons for the individual requests not only of those who live there, but also of those who request it. To become a resident, indeed, you have to apply, and we evaluate the person you are, your needs, and what you are looking for. Here we have different housing solutions. Family apartments, studios. Solutions that share toilets or kitchens or laundries. But the political battle was not only internal, to give us a horizontal participatory system, without a leader. The toughest battle was with the local authorities who have never looked kindly on our system of coexistence. We are annoying because we express a radical political idea of coexistence. But we also annoy for more material reasons. The good location of the district with relation to the port and the city makes it a potential strategic site to be sold to companies to make wealthy buildings, shopping centres, etc. Over the years, however, a strange balance has been created. Our political model of coexistence has been increasingly appreciated from a social point of view. Because we actually create aggregation, socialisation, and inclusion. This indirectly makes the city administration look good towards the citizens and, therefore, they were forced to lower the level of conflict with the residents' association.

In this scenario of less tension, the pub project was finally born. It's 2002, eight residents fall in love with this building. It was an old atelier but also a bit of a warehouse. Everything was almost in ruins. The eight residents did not have sufficient economic resources, even to buy the materials for the renovation. And this is where I come into play, who at the time acted as guarantor for part of the money that was needed for the renovation. And so the pub began to take shape with the neighbourhood's style of coexistence and mutual aid. Carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, whoever had a skill made it available to the project. We recycled and creatively repurposed everything that was possible to recycle and repurpose. The whole process of turning it into a restaurant was a process of salvaging materials, retrieving used stuff from other places that were either closing or changing their equipment. In this, the pub is an example of a circular economy. Sure – you ask me – could more and better be done? Absolutely! It is probable that the heat pump you see there is not 100% ecological because it is not the latest generation, hi-tech, and super-efficient one. However, its ecological value lies in being part, a component of a larger collective project. Over the years the whole business model changed because the eight initial founders wanted to do different things. Today we are three partners and ten employees.

Quotes

The whole process of turning it into a restaurant was a process of salvaging materials, retrieving used stuff from other places that were either closing or changing their equipment. In this, the pub is an example of a circular economy.

Keywords

People, residents, energy, building, scale, Norway, pub, environmentally, climate change

RL4_NO07, Norway, José, an entrepreneur of gastronomic taste from an intercultural history

Narrative

I am 41 years old, and I was born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from an Italian mother and a German father. I grew up with my parents until I was six, then they divorced, and my mother contacted her parents in Italy and we moved. So I grew up in the province of



Pesaro Urbino, where I attended primary school, then at the age of 12, we returned to Brazil again where I stayed until I was 17. These constant transfers and family issues have marked this period of my life, marking my personality but also giving me a lot of strength to react. At the age of 17, I therefore returned to Italy again, always in the same village in the province of Pesaro Urbino, where I finished my middle school studies and started working in the vineyards in the summer, picking grapes, and in the winter in restaurants. Now an adult (although I was only 19) I was disillusioned with the Italian system, the way workers were treated and the employers' attitudes. So I decided to move to London, initially for a while, to find myself, then I stayed there for several years. There I met my wife. In the meantime, my knowledge of the profession of chef has grown, as have my skills and our standard of living. Therefore, we lived for a few years between London and Italy to pursue my work as a chef and then also because our children were born. Finally, at the age of 30, we ended up in Norway, where I have now lived for more than 10 years with my wife and children. I immediately understood that this could be a country in which to invest myself, not only as a chef, but using the skills and knowledge in foodstuff that I had in the meanwhile conquered. Thanks also to my background heavily contaminated by different cultural histories – Brazil, Italy, and England. Norway was (and still is) a small country but with a growing economy, a dynamic situation very different from the stagnant economies I had known in Brazil and Italy. A country with great potential especially in the cookery segment, since from a gastronomic point of view, it offered very little when I arrived. When I arrived here, for example, the city was not like today. The centre was not so full of clubs and restaurants. Even the design of other restaurant districts (my note: downtown district full of shops and restaurants) were very different, architecturally speaking. For this reason, I have set up an entrepreneurial activity of importing high-end Italian food and wine products – such as wines and truffles – which I sell to various retailers such as restaurants.

Climate issues have a major impact on my business activity. Just think of how the worsening of natural events – storms in mid-seasons, hot summers – have a strong impact on the crops and therefore also on derived products. Or how the price of energy affects the price of products. Or, the relationship that exists between climate issues and workers' conditions. (In fact, if I could go back, maybe I'd get a degree in agriculture or agronomy or something similar. I would like to have higher knowledge in the field of cultivation and land treatment, and I don't think I would move to Norway. If I had a degree, I would stay and work in Italy.) This set of climate change variables makes my commercial activity unstable, in the sense that I must maintain constant contact between producers and customers, and always keep myself informed to compensate for the instability of the market sector with greater trust.

Coming back to my business activity, there are barriers that go beyond the climate issue and that are related to particular Norwegian trade policies. In general, it can be said that Norway applies a sort of protectionist regime towards products that come from abroad and this does not favour me, especially for alcohol-based products. Then there is the question of people's lack of mental openness towards new foreign products. Norwegians, in general, trust what they already know. I learned to overcome this obstacle by focusing on my marketing style, based on trust in my person. The customer knows me and trusts me, and, for this, he/she tries something new. In this way, I'm aiming to promote niche Italian products in Norway. Not big commercial brands, but small ones, sustainable productions, sensitive to environmental issues. For me, this is also a challenge: being able

to position Italian sustainable products on the local market. Therefore, I try to establish an almost direct line between myself, the producers, and the customers. I must say that this type of very human-centred and trustworthy approach – perhaps even a bit old-fashioned – is bearing good fruit so far. Certainly, the Norwegians are a bit suspicious and sometimes too closed. Sometimes I am still perceived as an “exotic” person after more than 10 years that I am here

Quotes

I’m aiming to promote niche Italian products in Norway. Not big commercial brands, but small ones, sustainable productions, sensitive to environmental issues. For me, this is also a challenge: being able to position Italian excellent products on the local market

Keywords

Wines, truffles, business, climate changes, Italy, Brazil, local authority

RL4_NO08, Norway, A small business of used records: Antonin, passion and care for time

Narrative

I am 35 years old. I have a university background that comes from the social sciences, with studies in the sociology of religion and anthropology. Before opening a second-hand record shop, I worked for many years as a technician in museums, also as a custodian, and, finally, as an exhibitor. My passion for music has to do with my life experience. I grew up in a small village far away from any record store, so getting new CDs was limited to maybe four or five times a year, including Christmas and birthdays. So, when I inherited a LP player and suddenly had access to all my father’s old records, that broadened my world considerably. Those same records are also part of some of my earliest memories of music. Because of my experiences with records as a small child and as a teenager, I was eventually more drawn towards the dusty darkness, the very smell of and the immediate connection with the past that I felt in the used vinyl store, rather than the supermarket-esque fluorescent lighted age of plastic CD store. It felt like the kind of place I wanted to be in, something I wanted to be a part of, and in the same way, the records felt like a part of the person I wanted to be. I sometimes think I can sense that same feeling with some of

the people who stop by the shop. I feel like saying «Yes, this is a used vinyl store. Please come inside. This is what you have been looking for». I'm not really participating in the whole discussion around the sound quality of different formats. That has never interested me very much. The other thing many people talk about is the physicality of vinyl records in the digital age. I tend to think of this in terms of how we invest ourselves in certain objects that we surround ourselves with, as a part of how we construct and portray identity, but I am not going to develop a whole thesis about that... I do believe music is very important to many of us though, and records can be a way of expressing that. Climate change and impact of the business activity.

I'm not completely sure there is a strong link between my business and climate issues. I'll explain. In general, I think people's awareness of climate issues is growing, as people say they are more inclined to worry about the risks to humans and the planet caused by climate change. And it is also true that this new inclination of people leads to a certain greater propensity to reuse materials, to buy used stuff. However, how much this – and my business – contributes to climate change I cannot say. That is, on the one hand, the reuse of a material that has already been produced is certainly a good and pro-environment thing. However, on the other hand, shops like mine still stimulate the record industry to produce more vinyl and this is perhaps not a good environmental thing. Then I think that real climate change policies cannot simply come from social behaviour. That would be nice, but too ideal. It is international politics and governments that should define the rules. Even when people say they care more about climate issues, I don't know how much those statements translate into genuine behavioural change. Often these are self-claims more to answer questions of political correctness or wanting to be polite.

Vulnerability as a young entrepreneur.

I am a young entrepreneur, I come from the province, but fortunately these vulnerable conditions have not weighed heavily on my business thanks to the fact of the neighbourhood we are in. Being here has benefits in many ways. Firstly, the low rents make it possible for entrepreneur to try this out with less financial risk than it would have been if renting a space somewhere else in city. Living in this neighbourhood also mean I don't need to work a full-time job to make ends meet, and therefore I can free up the time for this and other projects. I could probably not have run the store on the side of a full-time job, it's way too time-consuming. This is one of the many things this neighbourhood is about, to allow people to focus their time and energy on other things rather than just providing for the basics needs, paying of mortgages and such. This spurs creativity, and lets you invest more of yourself into the local community. My neighbours have all been very supportive of me starting up the shop, and I also find that people from outside find it very fitting that there is a used record store here.

Quotes

I grew up in a small village far away from any record store, so getting new CDs was limited to a maybe four or five times a year, that including Christmas and birthdays. So, when I inherited a LP-player and suddenly had access to all my father's old records, that broadened my world considerably. Those same records are also part of some of my earliest memories with music.

Keywords

Environmental, records, second-hand, climate change, community

RL4_NO09, Norway, Hannah, a vegan cafe but also an association for the promotion of ecological awareness

Narrative

Hello, I am one of the three co-founders of this café. It opened its doors in May 2016 and is a Café & Bar. We are three enthusiastic people, helped by numerous volunteers, who want to do something good in our local community. On our Thursday and Friday buffets we serve delicious vegan dishes made of organic ingredients. On our open evenings we also have nice organic drinks, snacks, a warm meal, and a stage with a variety of cultural events. The cafe is a place where joy, creativity, diversity, harmony and much more, converge to create a unique space: A café and bar that reminds more of your own living room than a typical urban café.

Before opening the restaurant, I studied at the university with an education in several scientific subjects. This curiosity led me to deepen my knowledge of anthropology and religious studies. Thanks to the experience acquired in the first years of university, I spent a period of my life in Nepal. I've never graduated.

Besides the experience in Nepal, another story that changed my way of thinking and made me decide to open the restaurant is having been part of environmental and ecological movements. This awareness has led to the openness and philosophy of this place.

Obviously, the impact on climate change and the desire to keep our ecological footprint low are characteristics of our cafe. In everything we do we try to be environmentally sustainable. Starting with the choice of vegan and vegetarian cuisine. But, also, in the selection we make of our suppliers. We also compost leftover food. My approach to environmental issues is holistic, I would say "flipping the script on climate change". In this, I share the thinking of the American philosopher Charles Eisenstein. We need to completely overturn our vision on environmental issues. Eisenstein proposes that if we were to feel that the rivers, forests, and creatures of the natural and material world were sacred or at least valuable in their own right, then our response might be more wholesome and ultimately effective. He declares valuing the living world simply for its carbon credits or for preventing the extinction of one species or another.

We have a different approach not only in the way of managing food and obviously in choosing veganism. We also try to go against the tide in our approach to the organisation

of the cuisine work. It is a common opinion that if you want to be successful in this field, you must work “to death”, sacrificing a lot of personal and social life. Friends, family, children. But not only your relationships with others, but also the relationships with yourself. This work, as understood by common sense, involves first a renunciation of oneself, of the time to dedicate to oneself, which for us is instead an essential reason for spirituality and wealth. If you lose this side, you lose a salient element of creativity and of the enthusiasm to welcome others, which is the basis of every eatery business.

For a long time, we have not received any support from local authorities. For years, the restaurant has functioned both obviously as a restaurant and, actually, also as an association. In fact, here we have always organised cultural and social events – book readings, theatre workshops, topic-related dinners. So, at a certain point we asked ourselves: why don't we register as an association? And so now we have been registered among the associations in the municipal area and we can take advantage of some concessions. It is a choice that helps us to lighten personnel costs above all, so as not to weigh on the restaurant's budget.

Indeed, one of the most difficult challenges, I would say sometimes a barrier, is to keep prices low and accessible. We want to offer a restaurant service that is accessible to everyone and not just limited to those who can afford it. Really, our reference target wants to be precisely that of the less wealthy people. However, the way capitalism has organised the system leads to the absurd consequence that the most authentic, natural, and healthy choices, are often also more expensive and not always accessible to everyone, while large-scale commercial distribution is cheaper, but it is also the one that massifies and destroys the unique value of what we eat, of how we live.

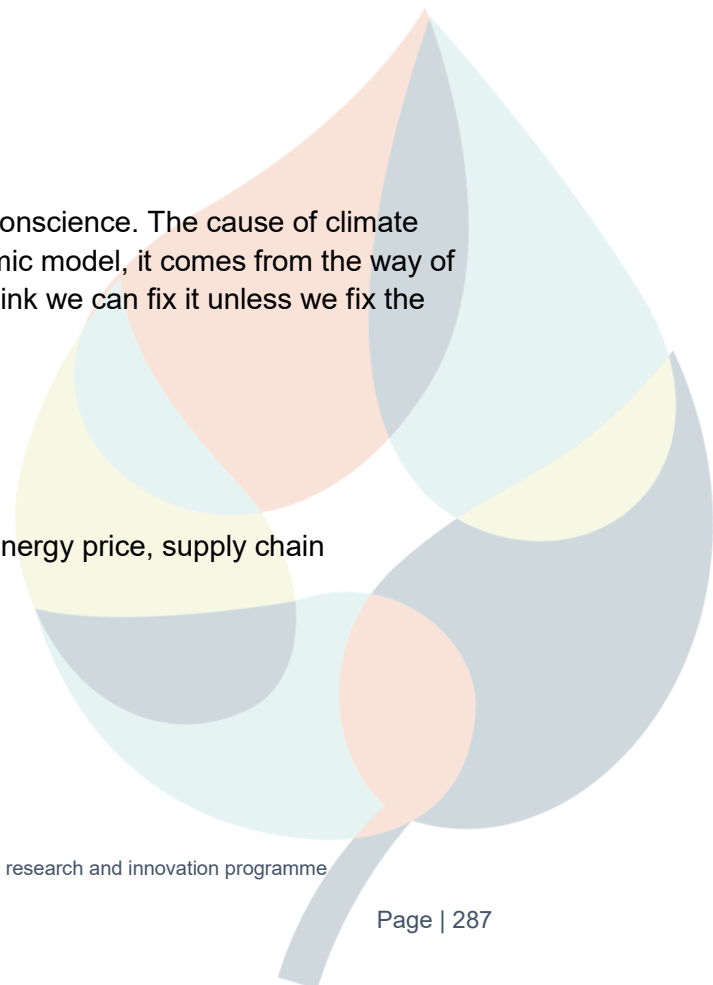
As a young entrepreneurial woman, I don't think I have suffered injustice or been victim of any forms of discrimination. I'm not saying that this doesn't happen in Norway, but in my case, there are other forms of barriers, as mentioned, linked to the type of catering we offer and, above all, to the economic system in which our philosophy and all of us are situated.

Quotes

I think something has to change deep down, in our conscience. The cause of climate change is capitalism, but capitalism is not an economic model, it comes from the way of thinking or the way of seeing the world. So, I don't think we can fix it unless we fix the cause of it.

Keywords

Vegan restaurant, climate change, consciousness, energy price, supply chain



RL4_NO10, Norway, Sarah and her daughter, between tradition and innovation for sustainable fashion

Narrative

I am Sarah, founder of a micro company based in Norway that combines ancient material traditions with modern and solid craftsmanship. I make sustainable, “blue”, short-travelled fashion. I’m not a designer, but an orthopaedic technician, a craftsperson, and I was working with producing clothing for people with disabilities, people who were missing limbs or needed support from corsets. In this job, I used a lot of leather, and I had to be careful with what kind of materials I used as these people were often suffering from different skin-conditions or had very sensitive. I had to learn about different poisonous chemicals that may be in these materials. As an orthopaedic technician, I had been searching for warming, cooling, elastic and stable textiles. We also had a very aware approach to sustainability. I liked my job, but I had started to dream about starting my own business using sustainable and locally produced materials to make clothes. I wanted to put my knowledge into use in the field of fashion. I talked to my friends and family about the idea, and everyone was very supportive, so in 2015 I decided to go for it. It was a bold move, and I managed to be the only Norwegian designer brand to be invited to the sustainable fashion show in Paris, and I got to show off my clothing there. This was a huge honour for me, and I really enjoyed the work. But it’s not easy to try to do things differently. There are many high-risk factors. If you want to market a 100% sustainable product, the associated costs are enormous for being careful using local products, short-term, sustainable suppliers, and also very ethical production. Furthermore, if you want real sustainability, you also have to visit the factories. I remember once I went to visit a factory in the Middle East which, theoretically, should have had an air suction system to guarantee the workers’ health and the air quality in the factory, but the air conditioner was just placed there in the factory and used for storage. Nobody even knew what this machine was for. This shows that supplier companies may look ok on paper, ethically and sustainability-wise, but in reality, this is not always true. Of course, there is no way of having everything 100% sustainable, ethical, and according to my wishes, but I put a lot of effort into making sure I only cooperate with those who can actually prove that they have these things in order. I utilise materials from the Nordic nature, materials that have a low carbon footprint. Salmon leather comes from food production and it has a carbon footprint of only a fraction of that from for example cow leather. I try to fight the throwaway culture and make a durable alternative for people. Reindeer skin is a wonderful product, and I also use goats skin that I get from a local farmer. He gives me the skins for free because it’s the meat he makes his money from, and he wants to support me in making use of also the skins. I then have the skins tanned. I also have my own small tanning lab and a lab where we experiment with different tanning alternatives. Tanning is a complex process and normally, there are a lot of hazardous chemicals involved. I want to make it in a non-hazardous and sustainable way. In this lab I cooperate with the university and have

students working from the department of Material design doing experiments that compares our non-toxic methods with the “normal” ones and try new methods. In general, I like to experiment and use materials that are unexpected and comes from animals who have walked freely under the midnight sun. A few years ago, a piece of clothing dating back to the Viking population was found somewhere in the Norwegian mountains. I decided to try and reproduce an exact copy of the fabric, to bring that ancient history to new life and new light. Here, I cooperated with a local weaver. It wasn't easy, as it took a lot of research and testing to arrive at a fabric that had the right wearability and safety features, but in the end, we did it. Not just a search for style, but a recovery of history. Unfortunately, there is no textile industry anymore in Norway since the oil took over as our number one export product, so I am producing this wool in Latvia. I always try to produce in Norway whenever possible. Obviously, this way of producing is a very costly process, and therefore I have mostly produced for the high-end market.

First, my brand was sold in different high-end boutiques in Oslo. These boutiques wanted me to produce a lot of additional accessories and blouses etc. I felt that I started to make too many things and losing my core-value. After a while I started my own shop together with five other sustainable fashion brands, where we took turns in attending the shop and selling to customers. We had different core products, and we could offer the customers a full concept combining our different specialties. For a brand like mine, its essential to have someone telling the sustainable narrative of each item to sell it. Before the pandemic, this shop was working fine, but COVID really made things hard, and we eventually had to close the shop down. Now I only have my online-store, and people don't really buy costly clothing without touching them and trying them on so I'm looking for an alternative. It may be a shop together with other designers again so we can offer a wide variety of products and I can keep focusing on my signature products. Currently, I am working on making a few “bread-products” that will be a bit less costly because I really don't want to be solely a luxury brand that only the wealthiest can afford. For instance, I have started to make merino shawls that are a bit more affordable. Of course, this is a challenge, but I like a challenge. Today, I cooperate with a lot of businesses, but this is just me alone. My daughter does all the designs, but she runs her own independent business that I cooperate closely with.

My search for sustainability in the fashion field moves in different directions. First, I focused on the recuperation of waste materials from other industrial chains. For example, I recover the salmon skin which is waste from the industrial processing of this animal. I make it into a textile material that acquires a new aesthetic and at the same time ethical value. But sustainability for me is also the recovery of traditions. Connect the past with the present. One of the biggest challenges is precisely that of certifying one's own sustainability. This forms a real barrier. I have always been interested in the issue of sustainability, and now I am on a mission to inspire others by showing that it can be done.

Quotes

If you want to market a 100% sustainable product, the associated costs are enormous for being careful using local products, short-term, sustainable suppliers, and also very ethical production. Furthermore, if you want real sustainability, you also have to visit the factories.

Keywords

Fashion revolution, garment, sustainable business, factory, boutique

RL4_BE01, Belgium, Extreme make-over - Change of business model

Narrative

I am Petra, a graphic designer. I created my business 15 years ago as I wanted another career, more linked to food and people. I first worked as a manager of a sales outlet of a local chain like Prêt-à-manger. To learn the job and the market. The restaurant is located on the ground floor of a former industrial building (workshop to cut diamonds). The energy crisis triggered a process of reflection that led us to drastic decisions, even to close the restaurant as no solution can be found to avoid a too high reduction of margin, making it meaningless to keep on working. The business model The start of the story is a decision taken a long time ago to save on personnel cost in a model with long opening hours (12 h / day). The choice we made was to work only with pre-prepared recipes. When the chef is there (daily) he produces, and the production is stored in appropriate packaging and stored in a fridge. Upon demand, the prepared meals are taken out for either take-away (in a specific packaging) or to be heated and consumed in the restaurant (if relevant as not all meals need to be warm). Meals are also displayed in the restaurant in a fridge. This approach reduces personnel cost (there is no “à la minute chef” present); but has logistics implications (packaging, cooling, ...). One of them is this “open” fridge displaying meals. The diagnosis In August, I decided to start measuring our energy consumption. We started to do this daily and comparing with the day’s activity. Key point has been the purchase of a device to measure consumption of the different appliances. This device has been moving from appliance to appliance and led to a much better understanding of the energy consumption. When plugging it in the “open display fridge”, we discovered the full production of our 18 solar panels was needed for only this. 3 hours after this discovery, the fridge was taken out of use. We controlled systematically all appliances and disconnected what was feasible to disconnect. This led to a process of systematic reduction of energy use. The expectation is that we will be at one fifth (!) by the end of the year. Another example is warm water. We had a boiler in the kitchen keeping the water temperature at a constant high. This was extremely comfortable for the team and when the option was considered to stop this, there was a lot of resistance. Still, it was taken out and one month later, nobody complains anymore. The team is now used to live without this “luxury”. Also for cooking, the chef is also adapting his habits and not bringing water to boiling temperature if not strictly needed (e.g. for pasta).

There are solutions and we discover and implement them one by one. The consequences and decisions We do not know yet what will be the financial consequences as we did not receive information from our energy provider. But my calculations based on the prices after checking what is mentioned for new contracts is that our energy cost for the first quarter of 2023 based on the consumption of this year's Q1 would be dramatic (average of 20K / month). This leads to an incredible level of uncertainty and I am angry that we are so dependent of the energy providers who are not transparent on prices. This is also why we decide to stop the restaurant. Changing the concept and business model is not feasible. What does this mean: •The hallway of the B&B house will become like a shop where customers can come and pick up meals and snacks; a much reduced assortment compared to today (not yet clear if there would be hot meals) •The living room of the B&B will be rearranged to become a place where people can consume. This is much smaller than the present restaurant. It is in this room the B&B guests have their breakfast and this will remain the same •The restaurant will be rented out for events. If it needs to be heated for an event, this becomes a variable cost compared to a fixed cost today. The variable cost is occurring only when an event takes place and is charged to the event organiser. We will do this transition in steps and trying to minimise the impact on staff. As all staff is more than 10 years with us, the “social passive” is very high, but we will assume this cost. It is the consequence of conscious decisions in the past to keep on working with the same people and not to do what others do in the business: never keep the same staff for more than five years. It is open from 8 to 8 on weekdays. My husband joined me to help in the business after a few years, first part-time and now full time. We have 4 people on the payroll: a chef (full time) and 3 ladies part time. The chef is a foreigner (US); ladies are all from Cabo Verde. All staff work more than 10 years with me (very stable). We started a second business 5 years ago. We managed to buy the house next to the restaurant and transformed this house into a B&B.

Quotes

After all, I am happy with the energy crisis. It has been an eye-opener. I hope we will never fall back to old habits.

The uncertainty about the price of energy we might have to pay is unbelievable.

Three hours after we had measured the consumption of our open display fridge, we switched it off.

Keywords

Restaurant, changing business model due to energy crisis, measuring consumption

RL4_BE02, Belgium, environmentally friendly B&B in an old city house

Narrative

I am Petra, a graphic designer. I created my business 15 years ago as I wanted another career, more linked to food and people. I first worked as a manager of a sales outlet of a local chain like Prêt-à-manger. To learn the job and the market. The restaurant is located on the ground floor of a former industrial building (workshop to cut diamonds). It is open from 8 to 8 on weekdays. My husband joined me to help in the business after a few years, first part-time and now full time. We have 4 people on the payroll: a chef (full time) and 3 ladies part time. The chef is a foreigner (US); ladies are all from Cabo Verde. All staff work more than 10 years with me (very stable). We started a second business 5 years ago. We managed to buy the house next to the restaurant and transformed this house into a B&B. We started the B&B 5 years ago. The difficulty was to make an existing building low energy consuming without losing the character of the house. This again meant looking for innovative solutions and sometimes compromises. For the windows: we decided to keep the existing windows but replace the glass by super-thin double glazing. For isolating the roof, there was no problem. This was different for the walls where we opted for a thick layer of insulation on the exterior of the walls. This was no problem for the back side, but a problem for the front side, where we combined this with a specific surface treatment.

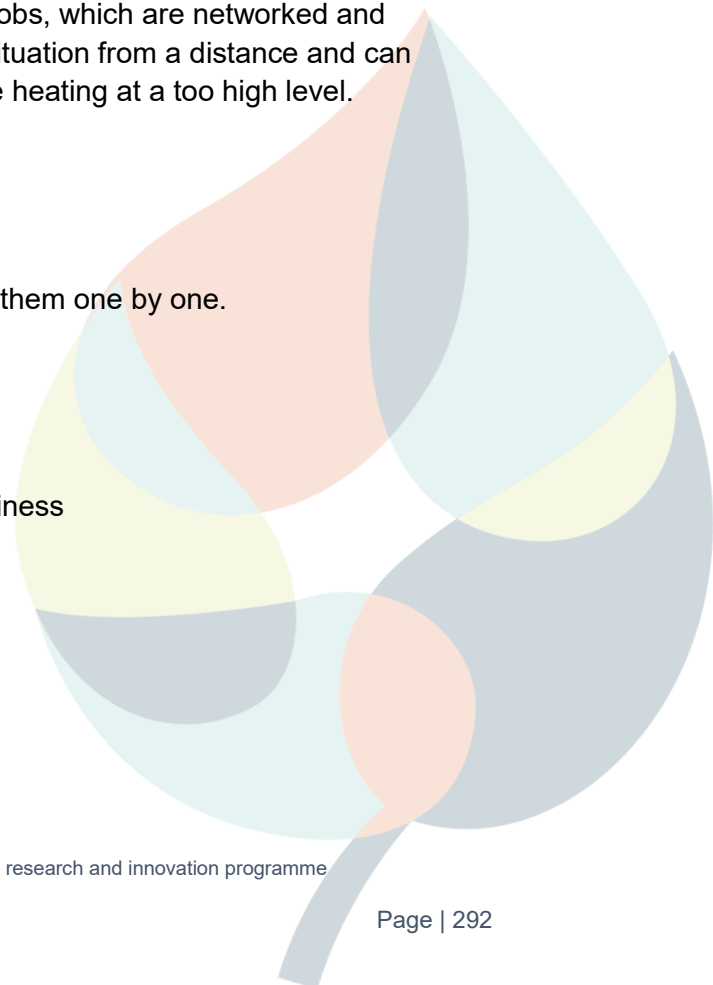
We needed to install bathrooms for each of the rooms. To save on the energy cost of the warm water consumption, we installed a system that recuperates the heat of the water after guests have showered. Warm water is also coming from sun boilers on the roof. For the heating: all radiators have intelligent knobs, which are networked and communicate with each other. We can monitor the situation from a distance and can intervene if e.g. guests have left the room but left the heating at a too high level.

Quotes

There are solutions and we discover and implement them one by one.

Keywords

Energy saving, smart solution, innovation, small business



RL4_BE03, Belgium, The frustrating search for zero plastic waste

Narrative

I am Petra, a graphic designer. I created my business 15 years ago as I wanted another career, more linked to food and people. I first worked as a manager of a sales outlet of a local chain like Prêt-à-manger. To learn the job and the market. The restaurant is located on the ground floor of a former industrial building (workshop to cut diamonds). It is open from 8 to 8 on weekdays. My husband joined me to help in the business after a few years, first part-time and now full time. We have 4 people on the payroll: a chef (full time) and 3 ladies part time. The chef is a foreigner (US); ladies are all from Cabo Verde. All staff work more than 10 years with me (very stable). We started a second business 5 years ago. We managed to buy the house next to the restaurant and transformed this house into a B&B. The ambition from the start was to strive for healthy food, bio and to minimise packaging waste, ban plastics. For the packaging, this has been a constant search for solutions, with some successes, failures and many frustrations, up to today. One of the main difficulties has been to find boxes that could be sealed to be used for take-away meals or for home delivery. This has led sometimes to solutions to use product A for the cover, combined with product B for the base for which you then need machine C; which are of course not meant to work with each other. This means lots of trials and errors to make this work. One of the solutions to avoid single use packaging waste has been to move to only biodegradable solutions. We have now managed, although in the process some of the solutions were often sub-optimal, in the sense that it is not always fun for the clients to eat from these boxes. We are taking risks in terms of client experience to stick to our values and meet our goal. But my main frustration is with soft drinks. We cannot do without the soft drinks as this is asked for by clients, and we cannot avoid these soft drinks to come with plastic. More concretely plastic + plastic + plastic (the soft drink; packed in 6 packs, who are packed by four six packs. Healthy food: We try to give only healthy food but do notice that most customers are not concerned with what they are eating. If healthy means more expensive, most people won't pay for it.

So for us it is a challenge to keep up to our norms. We always have to look at cost and also at the shelf life, which is our leverage: a much shorter shelf life with our healthy food, but still at an acceptable price for the customers. The same applies to bio food. Our experience with bio is that you need to clean it much more, which is again a cost. Even doing this, we have had some horror stories, like a snail in a salad. This is a horror as the client-victim posted on social media. We believe in the positive story of healthy and bio, but it is a constant struggle and balancing act. We are convinced clients do come and eat with them first of all because they like the food, and not because of our environmental consciousness.

We buy a lot of bio, but not all the sourcing is bio. Our location near a hospital means a lot of people who work there are customers. And among these people, many do ask a lot of questions on the food and whether it is healthy. This has helped us to be

attentive and to make sure all what we offer is properly labelled. We also learned to minimise salt, although you still need it for many recipes to make sure it tastes well.

We also make decisions for sourcing based on this: chopped meat normally has gluten, this is why we always buy pure chopped meat, so our offer with chopped meat will be gluten free.

Another example is fruit salad. We always make it fresh. Once I made a test with a supplier of fruit salad. The salad was cheaper and had a shelf life of 3 weeks. Ours has a shelf-life of two days. And it was good.

But because of the many ingredients added to extend the shelf life, we decided not to switch and keep on making fresh fruit salad every two days.

We go for flexibility, smaller portions (to minimise waste) and on Friday evening our shelves have 6 products instead of the normal 40.

Quotes

The horror was when we had a snail in the salad and the client posted a picture on social media. The price to pay to work with bio, even if we clean and clean.

Our location near a hospital means a lot of people who work there are customers. And among these people, many do ask a lot of questions on the food and whether it is healthy.

Keywords

Plastic waste, soft drinks, packaging, smaller portions, fresh food

RL4_BE04, Belgium, People - Planet -Profit applied in a service company start-up

Narrative

I am Cindy, 39, a single mother with three children, one of which is in primary school, the two others in secondary. My career has been in human resources, and when my employer started to fire most of my colleagues and team, I decided to quit the job. My former manager and I decided to start a business which started “on paper” on the 1st of January 2022. We used the first part of the year to develop our products and communication tools. We are fully operational since 1 October 2022. We have four products: HR consultancy (traditional “hard” HR on e.g. remunerations); soft HR (e.g. cooperation between teams);

individual coaching and training. We are two at the moment, but our ambition is to grow and hire people or attract more independent workers. I am now an independent worker.

At home, I have always tried to work with a zero-waste approach and I have tried to apply this in the job. The place we rent to give our trainings is so surprised we leave so little waste after our training is over. We have decided to work as much as possible from home to save on travel, but also to be there for the children as much as feasible. Both my partner and I are very conscious of the role we can play at individual level to save the planet. We both followed a 3 day training by Frédéric Laloux, which is a three step / three day approach: first day to show us what is happening and what this means for the planet; the second day, this person shows what his wife and him have managed to do to reduce their impact; the third day is used to reflect on what you can do yourself. This training was an eye-opener, for two reasons: it showed that we all can contribute to make the difference, and also that we should do what is possible and not what is impossible for us. E.g. if you live in Canada and your family in France, there is no way you can avoid taking the plane once in a while. Meaning you should work on other aspects than air travel. We have translated what we learned in the positioning of our company and use the 3P approach: people – planet – profit. This also defines what we are doing and what we could do more in future. We always do car sharing whenever possible. One of our clients is in Ghent and my partner lives in Brussels. So, I will go and pick her up on the way. Another client is in Liège. There we have a meeting point and go in one car from there. Public transport is not an option as we would lose too much time. Our clients are spread out all over the country and there is no way we could work only for clients nearby. Our cars are private, not from the company. I have envisaged to buy an electric car but could not afford it and bought a second-hand car. Switching to electric is something I would like, but I have too many questions and doubts. We have a car as I need it for my work, to go to clients. We also need for all our trips as a family, including holidays. I used to have a company car but when I started as an independent, I bought a second-hand car. I envisaged to buy a smaller one and then to rent a large one when going on holidays, but finally did not do it. The same applies to an electric car. We could do most of our trips in an electric car, both professional and family. But buying electric is too expensive, I could simply not afford. I know many people in the management of Decathlon. They have Tesla's as company cars. But they cannot use that car to go to the south of France on holiday. So, they go on holiday by plane. The whole benefit of driving an electric car during the year is given away when their whole family takes the plane for their holidays.

There are two barriers for me to act more eco-friendly: profit and time. Time: public transport is not an option as this means losing time and would not work with my family organisation. Profit: we need to live from the company, so we need a profit.

Quotes

This training was an eye-opener, for two reasons: it showed that we all can contribute to make the difference, and also that we should do what is possible and not what is impossible for us.

The place we rent to give our trainings is so surprised we leave so little waste after our training is over.

Keywords

B2B services, individual responsibility

RL4_BE05, Belgium, Kim's Involvement with SMEs Regarding Sustainability

Narrative

My Name is Kim. I am director of a financial administration company and a portfolio CFO (Chief Financial Officer) with several growing SME's. We typically work for SME with a minimum turnover of 5 mio Euro and a max of 50 Mio. That's when we will advise them to install a full time CFO. We start with installing an Advisory board and will stay connected with the company through that even when we no longer fulfil the portfolio CFO role. We support and partner with the CEO for general management and sustainability. Our major concern is what the company will mean for the entrepreneur at the end of their career. What should the company have accomplished in terms of its value to the ecosystem and its societal role. We raise the awareness of the CEOs for this purpose in society. We limit ourselves to supporting 6 to 7 SMEs but we do this on a long-term basis - not as projects - in order to reach these important goals such as sustainability. We typically work for one SME a few days a month and focus on its leadership. We'll help install the right resources and give support and advice and of course can be reached by the CEO for ad hoc questions. With respect to sustainability this would imply to look from a structural point of view which basic elements are missing - is the team futureproof? Do we use the proper purchasing procedures? Do we use the right materials or do we need to innovate towards more sustainable materials? Can we make our processes more sustainable, but also energy, both the generating and use part of it? How can we free up funds (also with financial support of the government) to invest more in renewable energy. For example, we will negotiate building wind energy for the SME-park and involve other SMEs in the industry zone as well as the population living in the neighbourhood to create a win-win for all and we will advise on how to finance this. Also waste streams - we look at how much is wasted and how this can maybe be done more circular. We will advise the CEO on their sustainability strategy and this involves both the commercial aspect but even HR. We will help them think about how to position themselves with respect to their eco-policy and communicate this but also, when you want to attract young people your employer branding is no longer about remuneration but about your vision on eco and sustainability policy. How concerned are you about the environment for the future generation. It always goes back to the basics - where are we as a company leaking money and how can we close the gaps and reinvest those funds better for the future. In our work we realise that

there is a long way to go in terms of convincing CEOs for a more sustainable strategy. Either they don't know where to start, or they are too focused on growing and not ready yet for more transparency or they have other challenges. But we believe that sustainability reporting will also become mandatory for SMEs and we look at how we can already motivate CEOs to start with this. We feel that the interest in this is growing. We are more and more asked to recalculate the operational model with sustainability in mind. e.g. what if we invest in a solar panel park, what will be the ROI and how can we get this financed.

I can see a big difference in sustainability awareness with CEOs from companies that have been in business for many years - ego more than one generation - they are often aware and the others, starters often and especially those with a different ethnic background who are less concerned with sustainability. They often think "we have to make it, make profit, build the business" and they are less concerned about the societal impact. They have a more individualistic policy - more opportunistic - more consumption oriented. They have a totally different mindset and are hard to influence. "we want a better life" is what they think. I have a different ethnic background myself - I am Vietnamese but I went to school here and had a good education and the awareness is built from generation to generation. It also depends on your personal interest. 1st generation migrants seem to be less concerned. What triggered my sustainability and green energy awareness? You can no longer ignore it. You will be confronted with it on a day-by-day basis if you follow politics and that is something you have to do as a CFO. You also see it in the streets. I have travelled a lot and if you see how much waste humanity produces and how we waste our resources you cannot stay blind for it. And of course I am also a mother. So, I feel it is unfair towards my children to consume unlimited and not think about them. What kind of society and earth are we leaving behind for them. So, everyone individually should look for what they can do themselves. Me - I recycle. Fanatically - even though I know they cannot process everything separately I want to teach the habit to my children already now. Whenever I can I will go by bike. I bought an electric foldable bike since I have to go to big cities often with public transport. Sadly, it was stolen a while ago. I invested in solar panels privately and am considering installing a rainwater recycling system when I have my garden redone. I strive to be self-sufficient since I think in the future we will all have to be self-sustaining.

Quotes

I can see a big difference in sustainability awareness with CEOs from companies that have been in business for many years - e.g. more than one generation - they are often aware and the others, starters often and especially those with a different ethnic background who are less concerned with sustainability. They often think 'we have to make it, make profit, build the business' and they are less concerned about the societal impact. They have a more individualistic policy - more opportunistic - more consumption oriented. They have a totally different mindset and are hard to influence. 'We want a better life' is what they think.

And of course I am also a mother. So, I feel it is unfair towards my children to consume unlimited and not think about them. What kind of society and earth are we leaving behind for them.

Keywords

SMEs, sustainability, future generations, energy, waste, strategy

RL4_BE06, Belgium, Michael's Ambitions for a Green Interior Architect Store

Narrative

My name is Michael and I am a 51-year-old man living alone in a Belgian village. I used to live in a bigger city, I am self-employed and I have a partner that lives separately from me. I have two children aged 12 and 14 years old, and I am in a co-parenting arrangement with my ex-wife, where the kids are with her for one week and then they're with me the other week. I am an interior architect who works freelance for now, sometimes for individual clients and sometimes for furniture stores. I usually work on-location at my clients' places, so my biggest cost and energy need is driving the car. I had my previous car for about eleven years and decided to buy an electric car two years ago. I'm very happy with that car. For the rest, it is only small energy needs for now, like the electricity needed for my computer. I am going to open up my own store soon though: I've bought a building in the provincial capital and my professional future will be to develop this store to the fullest extent. I am now planning the renovation of the building, which includes electricity usage, heating, etc. I'll be installing solar panels for electricity, but for the heating I will have to unfortunately rely, at least partly, on gas or fuel oil. I'm still looking for alternatives though. The primary mechanism that I'll use for heating (and possibly cooling) will be heat pumps, though they will probably not generate sufficient power for all of my heating needs. I don't want to install any on the side of the building either, as it's aesthetically not very pleasing. It seems that I will have to rely on a gas boiler, but I'm still trying to find ways of avoiding that and getting rid of the existing boiler. I do need to find some more information about that, and I think the authorities could probably play a role in providing more information about heating, maybe even subsidies to push people towards climate-friendly solutions. There have been similar state climate initiatives before, just not any for heating that I'm aware of. The house that I recently bought for my new home is connected to a 'heat net' and I'm very glad about that. A heat net can be thought of as a large-scale central heating system for multiple buildings, where heat is brought directly from heat sources to heating units. If a heat net opts for green energy generation, everyone connected to the heat net will have green energy. But that's not an option for the store because of renovation limitations. I don't have as much flexibility in renovating the building I bought for the store as I would for a completely new building, but I think I have good contractors and I am definitely still conscious about the climate aspect. That's a big

reason why I'm choosing solar panels, though they won't be enough to cover all of the energy needs I'll have. The store has a relatively small roof and the heat pumps also have to go on there, so there won't be enough panels in the end. The cost of energy is of course important right now, but that was not behind my reasoning for the solar panels. It's nice that it will help me weather periods of high energy prices though. The technical aspects of the installation and operation will be covered by the contractors; the regulatory aspects I haven't yet looked at in detail, but I don't expect that to present an issue. There's quite some information available, so I'm not worried. I'm intending to open the store late August or early September 2023, which is an ambitious plan, but the last quarter of the year is the most interesting season for the furniture sector so I have to make sure I can open by then. Most of my (prospective) clients will come to me from then on, instead of the other way around, and I will be driving to clients' locations less. Right now I don't have any employees, but I will have to hire at least one person by the time the store opens. I would prefer to have as little employees as possible, but pragmatically speaking that's not an option.

Quotes

I do have a number of questions I'm struggling with right now in order to handle [heating] as [climate-friendly] as possible. I don't find gas or fuel oil a nice option anymore, but it's not easy at this moment to find a good alternative.

The store has a relatively small roof and the heat pumps have to go on there too, so the energy [from the solar panels] will not be enough.

Keywords

Solar panels, climate-friendly, heat pump, heating, gas, store

RL4_BE07, Belgium, Ahmed's Method of Countering Food Waste and Limiting Energy Consumption

Narrative

My name is Ahmed and I am a 37-year-old man originally from Egypt. I moved to Belgium one year ago, after living in the UAE for a while, working in a totally different field: the sale

of air conditioning equipment. I switched my career to service design and worked from Belgium remotely for a while, still on UAE projects. Then I started this restaurant. It's a Syrian restaurant that focuses on employing Syrian housewives and mothers. Because me and my partner are service designers, we decided to approach the concept of a restaurant a little bit differently. We don't have a fixed set of recipes or menus, but we ask our chefs what they want to cook. I think this kind of personal touch is missing in the market: a place where you can get homey, cosy food as if you were actually eating at the chefs' homes. We employ between two to four people (all Syrian) as chefs and servers, but it varies from time to time. We don't generate our own energy, though we can usually keep energy costs down somewhat because we have two large terraces, one to the east and one to the west. This allows for a lot of sun to come in and we can save a bit on lighting and (sometimes) heating. Keeping the artificial light at a minimum is also just more comfortable for the guests. In the kitchen we mostly use induction plates for the cooking, but they're not constantly on as we usually cook everything in one large batch at a time. For the rest, we can't really do much more energy-saving because we have a small kitchen and there's no room to reduce the working-hours of the appliances that we need. With the high energy prices right now, there is of course a significant cost to our energy consumption, but there is just no way to optimise what we have now in the kitchen. But because we are a small part of a larger office building, our energy and heating footprint is not very big to begin with. We have some appliances like refrigerators that we are obliged to keep at a certain temperature or level, so there is no way to optimise on the energy use of these. A big thing that we are focused on is food waste: we try to minimise food waste by cooking in small batches. There is sometimes the risk that we run out of food, but for me food waste is a very big issue and so I'd rather have our food run out than to throw away food. We try to work with reservations as much as possible, so we know in advance how much to cook. We also don't order in bulk, but we buy all of the ingredients that we need from the market ourselves; that way we retain a large degree of control over the amount of food we use and our ingredients are always fresh. We go to the market about three times per week in order to do this, which is a bit of an effort, but we think it's worth it. Sometimes we encounter slightly higher prices because we don't buy in bulk, but what is the point of buying in bulk if you're throwing half of it away afterwards? So, in the end, I don't think we would save any money by buying in bulk, and our menu prices are similar to those of other restaurants. Limiting food waste is important to us for several reasons: apart from the cost, food waste is a global problem – especially in the hospitality sector – and I simply don't want to take it lightly. We deal with it in such a way that our customers are aware that they might not be able to get everything that's on the menu, but something else instead. If we run out, we run out. There are some organisations out there that buy leftover food from restaurants for people that need it, but we try to limit food waste in an earlier step already. Since we are a part of this huge wasteful industry, we try to take up our responsibility. We also include this in the image of our restaurant, so people are aware of this principle when they make a reservation. I think food waste will become a more pressing issue for other businesses in the hospitality sector as well, since the higher oil prices are affecting the food supply chain and making food more expensive too. Our model could be a way to mitigate those kinds of impacts; being independent from an unstable supply chain can have its benefits. We go to local small businesses for our food, so we aren't affected as much, and we can get every ingredient we need here.

Quotes

We are always trying to minimise food waste by cooking in small batches. Of course there's a risk that we run out sometimes, but for me it's a very big issue.

We ask for reservations [from our clients] not for the place, but to minimise the amount of food that's going to be wasted or thrown away.

Keywords

Food waste, local markets, energy, heating, restaurant

RL4_BE08, Belgium, Caitlin's Florist Business and Sustainability Efforts

Narrative

My name is Caitlin and I am a 35-year-old woman living in a small village. I have a child and, as a side job, I am a self-employed florist, which means that I arrange flowers in bouquets and other flower arrangements. I'm from a rural background and am in favour of more sustainable businesses, though I also realise that people here will not immediately make the switch from 'normal' flower businesses to more sustainable flowers and arrangements. For three years now, I have also worked in garden/yard maintenance and before that I was employed as a florist for other businesses/stores, so I know the ins and outs of the business. I have the advantage, with my side job, that I am relatively flexible with planning. I mostly work on-demand with online orders through my website and sometimes I sell bouquets at local markets. With the former activity, I either deliver bouquets by car or people come to my house to pick up their order. I'm thinking of switching to a cargo bike for delivering orders, but that depends on the distance I have to traverse. With the latter activity (local markets), there is often plant or flower material that isn't sold, after which it is waste material and I try to reuse it. I mostly buy the flowers from a wholesaler and only partly grow my own flowers, as I can't spare the time and effort to grow all of the flowers I need. There are also people in my neighbourhood that I can get some flowers from once in a while. The wholesaler I buy from does undertake steps to be sustainable: they only deliver three times a week while others do it almost every day, they use durable containers instead of cardboard boxes to transport everything. Cardboard is of course less bad than plastic bags, but you still have to throw it away afterwards. In my own business, I've also taken steps to reduce waste: I don't wrap my bouquets in plastic

but in paper (often recycled paper), and I only buy flowers with the MPSA or MPSA+ certificate. This is a Dutch transparency initiative so that you can see where the flowers originate from and what substances were used in its production. I do this to be more sustainable – even though a lot of people don't know that flowers with this certificate are by and large sustainable as well – but I also do it because I've had skin irritation in the past while handling some flowers; my cousin is also a florist and he actually developed sepsis once because of handling so many toxic flowers. Because the flowers are not meant to be consumed, farmers are allowed to use certain chemicals that are not very safe to have at home either. I also don't use floral foam, which are micro-plastics, to arrange any flower pieces. For example, they are often used by others in floral arches at weddings. Any other materials that I need, like vases, I often buy in second-hand shops. Whenever I buy anything brand new, I make sure that it is timeless and that it doesn't go out of fashion very quickly. Of course, there are always trends and fashionable styles, but as an entrepreneur I think it's important to have your own style. Besides, even though we are in the same sector, me and the other small florists don't see each other as competitors because we all have our own unique twist. All this being said, it's important to not just be environmentally sustainable but also entrepreneurially sustainable, as I see a lot of initiatives that stop after a few years because they couldn't make it work in a business sense. Newer 'colleagues' often subscribe to the sustainability story, but florists that have been in the business for years are mostly slow to adapt and respond primarily to customer concerns. As for the flowers I grow at home, I use one small (cold) greenhouse and the rest of the flowers I grow in the open air. The advantage is that I don't always have to rely on the wholesaler and in the summer I can sometimes even rely solely on my own supply. I do some work for a non-profit as well – maintaining gardens for elderly people – and a big part of the plants and pruned waste I can reuse and replant in my own business. A lot of this waste (and my own plant waste) I use in composting that goes straight back into my garden. I keep up to date with the latest news in gardening and floristry by listening to a few podcasts, which allow me to compare what I am doing with the practices of others and which inform me about sustainability. For instance, you can grow flowers in your own garden but if the bulbs originate from somewhere unknown, you can't be sure that it was a sustainable initiative on your part. There's also a Dutch website for sustainable florists that I sometimes consult (<https://www.duurzamebloemisten.nl/>). I do put it on my own website that I undertake sustainable steps, but I try to be modest about it because I am not 100% biological and I don't want to greenwash anything. The more you know about it, the more issues pop up: should I be using this iron or this glue? I think my commitment to sustainability grew gradually, but when I became a mother it became extra important to me to protect future generations.

Quotes

Sustainability is ultimately about protecting ourselves. (...) Becoming a mother made me realise that everything needs to remain OK for [future generations].

I do talk to people about sustainability [as it relates to my business], but it's not like I'm only trying to attract people who care about that.

Keywords

Florist, sustainability, plant waste, reuse, certificate, chemicals, future generations

RL4_BE09, Belgium, Elena's Goldsmith Business and Energy

Narrative

My name is Elena and I am a 40-year-old woman living with my husband and two daughters (aged 7 and 10) in a village. My main job is being a teacher in an elementary school: I teach ethics two days per week and my husband does the same full-time. I have been working a side job as a goldsmith/artist/jeweller for almost two years now. I was enrolled in a specialist education for years and have attended multiple schools (since before 2010), so I thought two years ago that it was time to officially start on my own. I don't have a separate store or special working space, so I do my side job in the comfort of my own home: my customers enter my living room and we have a small shed in the yard where I store most of my machines and appliances. So, the core of what I do is that I make custom jewels out of gold and silver mostly (sometimes with gems), like wedding/engagements rings. I buy the resources myself and then I process them by melting and shaping them into an appropriate shape. I need a big flame for the melting process, so I do that in the shed for safety reasons, though I do keep my gas and oxygen canisters in my home. Sometimes I also melt and solder small jewels on my workbench in the living room. I've organised a few jewellery workshops as well for interested acquaintances, but that's not on a regular basis as of yet. I want to make it a more consistent thing, but it's still on a small scale as I have to do it at home. The gas and oxygen canisters are things I buy separately; I don't have a connection to the grid for gas. But the appliances and the special lighting I use do require a lot of electrical power. The heating also poses an issue as the shed I normally work in is not insulated or heated, and I have to move to my workbench in the house during colder seasons if I'm not melting anything. Our heating at home comes from a heat pump and the electricity I use for my job partly comes from the solar panels on our roof. The solar panels are definitely not enough though, so we have to buy a significant part of our energy at the currently high prices. However, we have an energy contract with Ecopower, which is a 100% green energy supplier at least. For a time, we weren't affected by the generally higher prices, but a few months ago we did get notified that we would also have to pay more soon. I have started charging customers somewhat higher prices to compensate for this increase in energy costs. We try to not put the heating on too high, to not let any heat escape outside, but the house is fortunately well-insulated. As for my specialised machines and my



lighting, I always take care to turn them completely off when I'm done using them (and not in some kind of sleep mode). When my side job was still a hobby (more than two years ago), I also didn't use as many machines at home as I do now – as machines were available at the schools – so that has definitely increased the amount of energy we need. In our daily life and in our jobs as ethics/morality teachers, we are concerned about the environment and the climate and we are liberal-minded, so we try to have as small of a footprint as possible. That is important to us, and so for my side job the same principle has applied from the beginning. I often have to go to Antwerp for my job and I avoid taking the car by taking the train. I opt for public transport whenever feasible. We also chose to install the heat pump some years ago, as before we were heating with fuel oil. We are thinking of installing more solar panels as well, but we'll have to save up for that and there's also the practical matter of where and how we'll install them. I remember that it was very difficult when we first started getting solar panels or when we insulated to find out what kind of subsidies and advantages there were, and it would've been a lot easier for us if the government had provided one clear website with all of the potential subsidies on it. This might be the case now, but I'm not sure. Finally, the insulation materials for the shed are already here, it's just a matter of finding the time and energy to install them. If I were to make my workshops more consistent, I would want to do them in the shed and that can only happen when it's renovated a bit.

Quotes

We don't have gas, we have solar panels and a heat pump. That's where our electricity comes from and our heating as well. To shift the cost [of energy] a little bit, I ask a little bit more [money] from the client.

Keywords

Goldsmith, jeweller, self-employed, solar panels, heat pump, green energy, insulation

RL4_BE10, Belgium, Elena's Goldsmith Business and Sustainability of Materials

Narrative

My name is Elena and I am a 40-year-old woman living with my husband and two daughters (aged 7 and 10) in a village. My main job is being a teacher in an elementary

school: I teach ethics two days per week and my husband does the same full-time. I have been working a side job as a goldsmith/artist/jeweller for almost two years now. As for the materials I use, I find it very important that they are from a sustainable and trustworthy source. There are some options to ethically import gold, silver and gems – you can compare it with Fair Trade – and I try to do that as much as possible. Unfortunately, that is often more expensive than the alternative. There are also some gems that are only available through non-sustainable channels, meaning that you have to import them all the way from India. Obviously, Belgium doesn't have a lot of gem mines, so I do need to get them from far away sometimes. It can be quite opaque at times as well, as it is a whole world on its own and there are a lot of bad actors who try to cheat you. So, it is difficult to find suppliers who are ethical and don't, for example, employ slave labour. There is a big diamond sector in Antwerp, but you still have to figure out where those diamonds actually come from, and when I import directly I pay a lot of money for customs. Most of my clients do appreciate it a lot that I work with people I think are trustworthy about these things. For gold and silver, it is generally easier to be better informed about supply chains. The biggest producers in Antwerp claim to be fair and honest, and there is a lot more scrutiny directed towards them than there used to be. Often, I also get old gold from people that I can melt and purify myself, i.e., old jewellery. The same applies for silver. Regarding the packaging and boxes that I use for the finished jewels, there are some online shops that have vastly better options than Belgian shops, so I often buy these from abroad. I try to remain inside of Europe for this, but this is more expensive than outside of Europe and I've also bought from China before; I have since stopped doing that because it's simply too far. At the moment, I'm looking for little eco-friendly bags that I can use to put the jewellery boxes in, but I am still searching. Belgium does have the basic tools for smithing available, but for newer technologies like 3D printing an image onto jewellery I need to outsource it outside of the country too. On social media, I try to follow people – within the sector and generally – that give tips to be more sustainable and green. Given that I teach kids about ethics in school, I always feel the need to not be too hypocritical and to do my best for the environment. But the fact of the matter remains that the easy option is usually not the most ethical or ecologically responsible one. That's why it largely remains a personal choice for the other jewellers/smiths I know to care about and inform themselves about issues of sustainability. Another example is that we have to use certain products that are damaging to nature, like acids. You can replace those with self-made products that are less damaging and less intense, and that kind of thing pops up in international smithing Facebook groups from time to time (exchanging recipes for more sustainable products, etc.) but it's not something that everyone spends their time on. I try to make some of those products myself, if the recipes are simple enough. But there is still a lot of room for improvement on my part.

Quotes

[The gemstone business] is a whole world on its own and there is a lot of 'cheating' going on, even with the kind of gem. (...) So, it is a difficult search to find suppliers that you know are ethical, that [the gems] weren't taken out of mines by slaves.

As for environmentally friendly products... we often have to use products that are very damaging to nature like acids. You can replace a whole portion of them with a less effective version, so that they are less destructive for nature.

Keywords

Goldsmith, jeweller, self-employed, materials, supply chain, gems, metals, chemical products

RL4_BE11, Belgium, Please, give me a tool that calculates my environmental impact

Narrative

My name is Leslie. I am a self-employed professional working in the field of digital transformation. I help all types of organisations in this process, but most of my clients are local authorities. My services include consultancy and training, but also the development of specific applications; I have no employees, but work with sub-contractors. I am also a mother of three children. I studied engineering in Georgia, from where I am. I married a Belgian husband.

Your question on how environmental issues come to the forefront of my daily management and how I address them is very difficult. I am not making anything. (It will take her some time to get into the subject and find issues, decisions and challenges she faces; they will come gradually, but without much probing from the interviewer). Regulations do play a role for me. I work a lot for the authorities. This works with e-tendering. Everything is electronic, also the invoices. The consequence is that I have chosen to work with XX (an online service) and that all my administration is in the cloud. No paper anymore. This is a positive evolution and therefore a positive influence on me from the public sector. Another consequence is that I have a paperless office, I don't even have a printer. Regulations help to convince you, are nudging your behaviour. This is also the case for my car. The fiscal treatment of cars has pushed me to go for an electric car. Not all these decisions are triggered by regulations; It is my own decision to use public transport whenever possible; the car is a back-up when this is not feasible. I am for sure environmentally conscious. You can see I wear three pullovers as the heating is switched off. It would for sure help me if I had a tool to help me calculate the impact, as I assume that a lot of my impact must stay below the radar. An example are my presentations; I was using in the past moving pictures. This uses a lot of electricity. If these moving images have no added value, I now take them out. A lot of people use such images. My colleagues at university (she teaches as well) also use them a lot not knowing their

impact. We have calculated their consumption. I discovered this when my laptop run out of battery in the middle of a presentation. I had forgotten my cable and was surprised my battery was low so fast. We have never any appliance in standby also because of this. I found out that 10 % of global electricity consumption comes from the machines that are on standby. People think that blockchain uses a lot of energy, but this is only 3 % of the total, compared to 10 % for standby. I do not believe we can get rid of all the excess consumption, but having better information would allow to make conscious choices.

It is wrong to believe that digital is better for the environment than non-digital solutions. There is a footprint of the digital solution as well. I am not calculating this, and my clients do not expect me to do it. When clients move to digital, they do not do it to have a positive impact on the environment. They have other motivations. This is the case for towns and municipalities. They went for “radical digital”, but discovered this is not possible for all. If they want to be inclusive, they have to keep non-digital services. You have to do what people need. I would really like to know if storing a document electronically in the cloud “forever” has a lower impact than printing and keeping the paper in an archive. Dropbox: I have a lot of documents on Dropbox. They offer the possibility to choose where your data is stored, like on a place where no/less cooling is necessary. I believe this is always a question of judging based on added value. What does this solution bring me more and is it therefore worth it if the environmental impact is higher. This is also the case for meetings. We take for granted that the environmental impact of a Zoom meeting is lower than a physical meeting. But is that so? So many computers are involved to make this meeting possible. Can we compare both and see from when / which impact difference it becomes worth it? Compared to a physical meeting that has other values?

Quotes

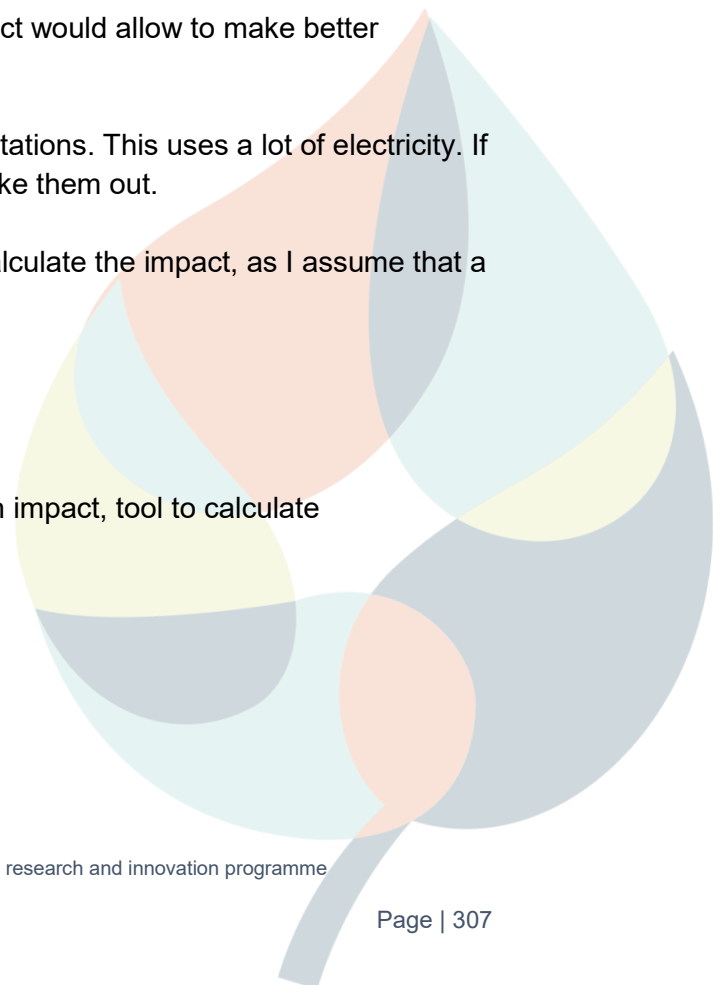
Having better information on my environmental impact would allow to make better choices.

I was using in the past moving pictures in my presentations. This uses a lot of electricity. If these moving images have no added value, I now take them out.

It would for sure help me if I had a tool to help me calculate the impact, as I assume that a lot of my impact must stay below the radar.

Keywords

Self-employed, environmental impact, information on impact, tool to calculate



RL4_RO01, Romania, Eco-friendly and community oriented values driving the management of a grocery business

Narrative

I am a 55-year-old woman, married, with two children, who manages (as a general manager) an eco-friendly grocery store in the central area of the city. I have worked for many years as an accountant for a private university, but I quit my job in 2018. There had been financial difficulties and other kinds of pressures in my workplace, mostly created by a bad management, and I also realised over the years that I didn't feel personally fulfilled by what I was doing. I have always been interested in healthy eating and healthy living in general, and also in relating and communicating to people. The business was started in 2016 by me with a couple of friends, and recently relocated in a more central and crowded area of the city. Our small company now has 7 employees. The main idea behind our intention to develop this grocery business was to cultivate in our community the joy of living harmoniously with the nature, by joining brands, people and nature together in a sustainable fashion. So, it's not just the eco-friendly aspect that counts in our vision driving our daily work, but also the community aspect, the relationships between people. Specifically, we try to promote kindness, harmony, equity, love, as well as connecting to the genuine human needs that include friendship, quality time and quality and healthy food. This is a type of social responsibility that I've noticed to be increasingly frequent for Romanian businesses, and I believe that is great. Our main social responsibility is to be friendlier towards nature in comparison to the regular food-oriented businesses. The way to do this is to market eco-friendly products, which also ultimately bond the community, in that they are produced locally, are healthy and that we and our families actually consume or use, so that we really trust them personally.

"We aim to prove that it is possible to adopt an alternative way of consuming, one that is responsible towards nature and sympathetic and caring towards people". The fact that we only sell products manufactured by producers in the area means that we limit our carbon print. We try to promote healthy food by marketing a lot of zero-lactose, zero-gluten and zero-sugar products. Moreover, we also select our products especially from producers which are themselves eco-responsible in their approach and technology. Our eco-friendly approach also includes bringing in and selling as many of our products as possible in their non-wrapped state, and include in our offer as few products wrapped by their producers as possible, especially in materials that are not eco-friendly. Besides food, we are also selling coffee and tea from farms that use ecological and fairtrade practices, growing in clean land with no pesticides. We recycle the coffee grounds by using it as an acid supplement to the sustainable plants in our offer, grown in our private ecological farm. We also offer a discount to clients who use their own reusable cup when purchasing coffee or tea from our store, thus contributing towards reducing waste, while using only bio-degradable cups for those who don't. We also try to limit the use of plastic in all the things we sell, as we feel that there are plenty of natural materials that can be used

instead, not only in the food industry and businesses, but also in many other areas.

“Nature offers us everything we need, every type of material that our life and comfort depends on”. I also think that these ideas should be shared by a large part of the community in order to make them count, in order for them to have a true impact in terms of protecting the environment. That is why we also intend to organise meetings, together with and through our regular customers, in which to disseminate our approach, some kind of workshops in which we would talk about sustainability, waste reduction, and also about the fact that this does not imply the need of self-sacrifice, as there are plenty of eco-friendly alternatives available. It is only a matter of encouraging small but significant changes in people’s everyday choices. And people should be educated about how they can integrate eco-friendly, sustainable, plastic-free products in their daily life. I must admit that this is also important for keeping our business alive. At first, we didn’t have enough clients to render our store profitable. For instance, many people were not used to the seasonal natural character of vegetables and fruits anymore, and they entered our grocery expecting to find every type of vegetable and fruit irrespective of the current season, like they could find in the supermarkets. They were a bit disappointed by our offer, but some of them realised the advantage of our goods, not only in terms of sustainability but also of health, and returned or became regular customers. Nevertheless, gaining a reasonable number of clients was a slow process. Another issue was to identify local producers, preferably from our own county or at least located not very far away, which would use sustainable agricultural practices and not the pesticide-ridden ways that came to characterise, unfortunately, the approach to farming of many Romanian producers nowadays. Moreover, we needed to make sure that we have enough products supply across the year, which was challenge, since we sell seasonal products. Yet, step by step we have managed to locate enough producers to keep our stock running, and over the past years more and more farms using sustainable practices have appeared in our area. From my experience, they are driven especially by their pro-environmental and community-oriented values, as doing sustainable and ecological farming in Romania is not yet a very profitable endeavour. Another obstacle that we came across and that we are still learning to properly overcome is that of the national regulations and agencies controlling food businesses in Romania, but I guess this is something common for all businesses of this kind here. The COVID-19 was also a hard time, we nearly shut down our business, especially since in the beginning we didn’t have the logistics to deliver at home our products, or even a proper website. But we adapted, and we recovered, and now we’re “driving at full speed”. Our client base is steadily growing, and we have the feeling of being part of an actual community interested in our principles, who are not just customers but also fellows or partners in our eco-friendly and people-oriented goals.

Quotes

We aim to prove that it is possible to adopt an alternative way of consuming, one that is responsible towards nature and sympathetic and caring towards people.

Nature offers us everything we need, every type of material that our life and comfort depends on.

Keywords

Eco-friendly products, responsibility towards nature, community-oriented business, personal values, sustainable farming practices

RL4_RO02, Romania, Capitalizing on one's professional skills towards authenticity and eco-friendly options

Narrative

I am a 62-year-old woman, married, with one child, born and raised in the Republic of Moldavia, where I have lived until 1999. I grew up in a middle-sized town and after high school I began working as a tailoress in a clothes factory that had a long history in our area. But times were hard, we barely made it financially from one month to the other, so together with my husband we decided to emigrate to Romania, and we also took our daughter with us. When we moved here things were not much better from the economic point of view, it was hard to find a job, especially since many of the factories and industry in Romania were being privatised and then shut down. Being a newcomer, a foreigner, although speaking the same language, didn't help either, as there were no new jobs on the market and the Romanians themselves were struggling to keep their jobs and make ends meet. I finally found a job in a small tailoring workshop, but the pay was low and the workload was very high. We had acquaintances from our country who had moved here, but many of them were leaving were thinking about leaving to the Western countries, especially Italy. So in the end we did that as well, me and my husband left for Italy, while my daughter went back to her grandparents in the Republic of Moldavia, until we could manage to settle in. My husband quickly found a job on construction sites, and I have also worked in an elderly care institution for three years. Then I found a better paid job in a tailoring workshop, and discovered that I was still quite good at this, and consequently appreciated by colleagues and managers. My husband also succeeded in creating his own small building company, employing mostly Romanian and Moldavian people referred to him by people he knew, and things were on a positive trajectory. But in 2017 my husband had a work accident which left him with a severely disabled leg, which made it impossible for him to continue his work. He then decided to move back to Romania, where our daughter had also moved and married in the meantime, and thus to be also closer to our homeland. We moved to a North-Eastern city in Romania in 2018, and we decided to try to open a business with some of our savings. This would also allow, at least that is what we thought, to spend more time together with our two grandsons. We decided to take advantage of my skills as a tailoress and to open us a business in this field. I also

decided to focus on natural fabrics, since this was the type of material that I had loved to work with in my early years in this profession, and also because I think the clothes become more authentic in comparison to the industrial merchandise sold that is to be usually found in shops. At the same time, my daughter and I had long talks about this. She highlighted how important are natural fabrics for children's wearing, and how sought for are these type of clothes among young mothers nowadays. I also noticed how expensive are children's clothes made from natural materials, and thus I realised that I could make them at much more affordable costs, so that could be a good business direction. My daughter has also inspired me to be more eco-conscious, and to develop my workshop in a manner that would have the lowest possible environmental negative impact. On the other side, I have always perceived myself as having a deep connection to nature, stemming from my childhood, which I mostly spent at my grandparents in the countryside.

"The nature of the countryside created a much simpler and more beautiful life than the one in the city. But although we generally think that is another universe and that it's impossible to have them both, I believe that there are small steps that we can make even in the city towards having some connection with nature. At least we can contribute towards limiting the harm that we usually do to it". "Moreover, I feel that the clothes themselves are much more authentic, more similar to what people in my generation were accustomed to wear, so these ideas coming from my daughter also struck a chord in myself." I opened the business in 2019. At first, I hired two girls, now there are four employees. We began by producing only children's wearing, and only from natural fabrics. Locating suppliers was not hard, but at the same time many of them were from far away countries, including China, so this was opposite to our eco-friendly principle. Gradually we managed to contract suppliers from closer areas, and even local producers. A major problem was that we actually began selling our clothes when the COVID pandemic came in 2020, which was a major drawback for all sellers. In our case, we realised that we cannot afford to keep on producing clothes and then leave them on stock with no outlet to sell them, so we began manufacturing mostly on demand custom-made clothing, offering customers different choices from our patterns. Our family savings also began to dry out, so there was a dangerous point in which we found ourselves, close to losing everything. Our luck was that we managed to advertise our products on social media and especially through the groups and communities of mothers that my daughter was part of. She was also skilled in explaining the advantages of natural fabrics, not only that it is an eco-friendly option, but also that these clothes last for a much longer time. We have also been very attentive to the local business environment, and integrated in this community, in associations that aim to promote local businesses. This has been effective in ensuring a steady flow of clients, and from some of them we also got the idea to limit the waste produced by our workshop by donating the leftovers and clippings of fabric in order for them to be used by others. And recently we began sending part of these clippings to three private kindergartens where they are used in various crafting activities with children, or for decorating the rooms. These relationships are mediated by some of our clients. Other mothers have asked us to create clothes for them as well, and now we are preparing to go into this new area as well. I am optimistic about it, since I have enough experience to create good adult clothing.

Quotes

The nature of the countryside created a much simpler and more beautiful life than the one in the city. But although we generally think that is another universe and that it's impossible to have them both, I believe that there are small steps that we can make even in the city towards having some connection with nature. At least we can contribute towards limiting the harm that we usually do to it.

Moreover, I feel that the clothes themselves are much more authentic, more similar to what people in my generation were accustomed to wear, so these ideas coming from my daughter also struck a chord in myself.

Keywords

Nature-oriented, authenticity, hardship, eco-friendly products, migration

RL4_RO03, Romania, Creating employment for people with disabilities and sustainable products

Narrative

I am a 44-year-old man, single, living with my mother (my father deceased 4 years ago). I live in the city now, but for most of my childhood I lived in the countryside, in a village around the city. My parents were working there, in the agriculture (my father) and in the local school (my mother). When I was 14 I was involved in a car accident. I was severely injured and left paralysed from the waist down, so I had to use a wheelchair from then on. That was a severe shock, I couldn't even go to school for the next year, and felt that my life was really over. But I was greatly supported by my parents, who did their best to offer me emotional comfort, as well as by some of my friends. I finally graduated from middle school, and my parents decided that the family would move in the city so that they could help me follow high school. We did that, and despite the difficulties and the struggles of being a disabled person at a time when there was little support for us in general, for instance in terms of access to buildings or public transportation, they helped me and I gradually adapted to the situation, so I also graduated from high school. But the way people, especially school peers, had been treating me made me decide not to go further in my education, so I didn't go to college. Another important factor was that things were

not easy for my parents, as my mother had to take a worse job in the city, and my father was frequently commuting to the country house in order to take care of things there. So I felt compelled to get a job and help them financially, or at least to become somewhat independent. I looked for jobs that would fit my disabled condition, and I found something in a small antique store, where I was a seller for four years. But the pay was low, so I was keeping an eye on every opportunity that may have crossed by. This is why I have had several jobs across those years, as well as some time when I was unemployed. At some point I got in contact, through the internet, with people working in an association that aimed to provide jobs for the disabled, and they were also organising meetings. I went to some of these meetings, and noticed that there is a lot of people in my situation, confronting the same problems that I have, who joined. Moreover, this association was also collaborating with a legal consultant, who suggested that we make use of the fiscal advantages that had been recently introduced in the Romanian regulations in order to support enterprises that hire disabled people. I studied the issue and the possibilities, and decided to start my own business of this kind. That was at a time when there was a lot of talk about replacing plastic bags, and many people said that this would be too inconvenient, as no practical alternatives exist. We, as Romanians, have a special relationship to bags since the communist times, as people would be carrying around their personal, old-style, ugly nylon bags just in case they would come across a grocery store where they would actually have something to sell. So now the supermarket bag is the symbol of economic rebirth, and carrying around one's own bag would be like returning to the past. Nevertheless, I believed that there is a business opportunity here, so I took a bank loan (my parents helped me again with that, by mortgaging their country house). I opened my business five years ago, and now there are 10 employees, 6 of which being disabled. I am the manager, but I have been greatly helped by the people in the association mentioned above, with all the paperwork and even the financial reporting at the beginning. There was a huge struggle to fill in all the legal requirements, as the regulations aiming to support the inclusion of the disabled in the job market are managed by different institutions than those granting many of the rest of the usual approvals required for all businesses, and it was a struggle to harmonise them. We produce bags from natural and some from recycled cotton and from cloth, as well as backpacks, purses, and some pieces of clothing. We pay a lot of attention to limit waste, and the first thing we did was to use cloth and cotton waste in producing other bags. Generally, we're trying to do things in a sustainable way, and this interest towards environmental protection is important to me from my childhood, from the way I was raised in the country side. My parents were very fond of nature, and talked about city residents as polluting and damaging the environment, in spite of our duty to respect it. So this is what I'm trying to push forward to people in my work, the fact that it's better to make choices with no environmental impact, such as using a recycled cotton bag instead of buying plastic bags for your purchases. Of course, we try to make them as nice as possible, so that it wouldn't remind people the communist scenario mentioned before. We sell them online, and we even have clients from other countries, due to the support and relationships abroad of some people in the association. I could say that they sell better abroad, as many of the Romanians are not ready yet to replace the cheap plastic bags and to pay a little bit more for a sustainable product, but things will change. The second important dimension of my work is offering jobs and thus social inclusion for disabled people, since unemployment in this group is enormous, and many do not get the chance to have proper jobs. In this

respect our business has received important support from the regulations I mentioned.

Basically, companies that buy from us can deduct a part of their state taxes from their purchases, and this represents an incentive for them and a help for us in terms of sales. I hope this state support will last, although the instability of the economic regulations in our country makes me anxious on this matter.

Quotes

I felt like being disabled has created an obstacle also in my path towards entrepreneurship.

My parents were very fond of nature, and talked about city residents as polluting and damaging the environment, in spite of our duty to respect it. I grew up with this concern, and I brought it with me when I moved to the city.

Keywords

Disability, employment, sustainable bags, community, zero-waste

RL4_RO04, Romania, Recycling others' waste in a green manner

Narrative

I am a 45-year-old woman, born and raised in the city. I am married, with two children of 10 and 8. After graduating from university, where I studied management, I got a job as an executive assistant in a local private company. My husband also has an office job in another company, and he still works there. After giving birth to my first child, I went into maternal leave for two years. The money I received were a fraction of my regular salary, and that was quite low, especially since my husband's salary is not that high either. This is why we starting thinking about starting some kind of business, once my daughter was 1 year old and my mother was also able to move in with us, which freed up part of my time. After going through several options, me and my husband came across the idea that we could develop of service of recycling for companies that do not have high quantities of material to recycle. That was 8 years ago, I had more time than my husband to take care of the paperwork, and after my second child was born, I quit my past job and invested

most of my free time in developing this business. At that time, the Romanian companies were obliged by a law that was had been introduced a few years before to invest in waste management. For companies that produced a lot of waste, that was solved by contracting waste management companies that would take care of everything, by picking up residuals and depositing, recycling or eliminating them. Yet, many small or medium businesses, especially office-type companies, were not willing to contract these companies because that would have meant paying a high fee for small amounts of waste: since the waste is collected by large trucks, the regular waste management companies charge the same amount of money irrespective of the actual quantity they collect. Consequently, some of these companies preferred to manage their waste on their own, or to do nothing in spite of the official regulations, just throwing everything in their trash bins. Our idea was to provide the service of collecting small amounts of waste, more specifically recyclable materials, from this type of businesses, and to do it more often than the schedule of the “big” waste management companies. For me and for my husband this issue of collecting and recycling waste is quite important, as we both have felt that the city is polluted enough as it is. We both saw how much waste is produced in a regular company, even one in which people mostly work in offices, and recycling this waste can really make a difference.

“When we were children, the communist school always insisted on recycling, there was a big poster with the three “R”s (reduce, reuse and recycle) even in my classroom, and I remember our primary school teacher often talked to us about it. And I think that was a great way of inducing respect for the environment and good behaviours, that has been somewhat lost in the meantime.” There is more interest in being eco-friendly in the last decade, but some people consider recycling as something that would be mostly imposed by authorities, because of the way the message was disseminating during those years in the past. I read statistics showing that Romania has the lowest rate of recycling in the European Union, and that is a big problem. And this is what we also discovered at first when we contracted our clients, that many of them did not have separate recycling bins for different materials, although “on paper” they committed that they would have them. At first, we used a second-hand truck for collecting the bins, but then we decided to go a step further towards an eco-friendly service and we replaced it with cargo tricycles, thus generating no pollution. We were somewhat lucky to have good connections in the local business environment, people from various companies that we could talk to personally and advertise our service. We now have 7 employees. We collect and recycled solid waste: paper, cardboard, aluminium recipients, metal cans, plastic, we sort them properly and we take them to the dedicated city waste collection sites. “When we opened up, we thought we would access funding from the Ministry of Environment, through a program dedicated to enterprises in the area of environmental protection. But we discovered that it was impossible for us to do it, because they had a long list of conditions that one had to fulfil, many of them very expensive for a small enterprise as ours.” They also required several accreditations one had to obtain from their agencies. So, we just got a bank loan for small enterprises instead. Also, across all the years, we haven’t received any support from the state, although there is a lot of talk about moving towards the EU aims of green economy and eco-friendliness. But we believe that we’re providing an important service, as we’re contributing towards having less pollution, we recycle a lot of stuff that otherwise may end up wasted or polluting, and we also create green jobs with our tricycles. Our clients have the same perspective, especially once they see that it is not hard to collect waste selectively and they feel they are part of the whole process of recycling. I think,

nevertheless, that there should be more support from the state for our type of business, since the green policies are so highlighted as important for our country and for EU, for instance cutting part of the takes we pay for the social and medical insurance of our employees. But as usual here, that is just talk, in reality the state leaves entrepreneurs to manage on their own, and even tries to tax them as much as it can. Also, the COVID-19 period was a hard time, we nearly closed the business, as most of the offices were closed. But we recovered, and luckily we were able to keep or to get back with us most of our previous employees.

Quotes

When we were children, the communist school always insisted on recycling, there was a big poster with the three “R”s (reduce, reuse and recycle) even in my classroom, and I remember our primary school teacher often talked to us about it. And I think that was a great way of inducing respect for the environment and good behaviours, that has been somewhat lost in the meantime.

When we opened up, we thought we would access funding from the Ministry of Environment, through a program dedicated to enterprises in the area of environmental protection. But we discovered that it was impossible for us to do it, because they had a long list of conditions that one had to fulfil, many of them very expensive for a small enterprise as ours.

Keywords

Recycling, tricycles, selective waste management, woman, office waste

RL4_RO05, Romania, Importing and making a business out of models from other countries

Narrative

I am a 34-year-old man; my mother is gypsy and my father is of Romanian ethnicity. I am married and I have a child. I went to a professional school, in a class with a technical curriculum of automobile mechanics. After graduation I couldn't find a proper job here, so I went to work abroad. I knew people who had left before, in various countries across

Europe, some of them were my former colleagues from school, and I asked some of them to help me find jobs. I stayed in the Northern Europe for 10 years, after living for two years in the UK I moved to the Netherlands. I have worked in several places, including in agriculture at first, but I like the life in the city more, so I looked for jobs in several places in the city. I got a job in the Netherlands, in Rotterdam, in a car service that also serviced bicycles, and I got more interested in this, it was new to me and it was also a cleaner job than working on cars. I had this job for almost five years. But my wife was with me and she couldn't get a proper job there, so at some point, five years ago, we decided to move back to Iasi. I had saved some money, and when I got back here, I talked to people I knew about how it would be best to use it. It wasn't much, I couldn't buy a house with it, so I decided to open a business, especially since I didn't want to take on a bad job that I wouldn't have liked. Some friends advised me to open a car service workshop, but I noticed that there was only one bike repair workshop in the city, while there was a car service in all small neighbourhoods. I also wanted to continue working on bikes, as I had done in the Netherlands. Moreover, I thought that people here would begin to use bikes increasingly often, as there is no more room for cars on the street already. The pollution is another major problem, you can smell it in the air, and it affects us all. This is why many westerners switched to bikes instead, and they did the proper thing. "The cities in the Netherlands are much less noisy than ours, and you feel more relaxed because of that, and more in contact with the nature and the people around. Here, the streets are crowded with cars, all discharging smoke and making noise. This is very far away from nature." When I opened my business, I was lucky I met someone in an NGO providing social services to the disadvantaged people who helped me. She explained me what I needed to do, and helped me with the paperwork. I realised that I needed more money to rent a place for the workshop and to buy the tools I needed, besides doing some refurbishing of the place. So, I looked for a bank loan for small entrepreneurs, which was not easy to get, although the lady from the NGO also helped me with a business plan that I needed to show. I guess some bank tellers just didn't find me trustworthy because of the colour of my skin, and also because there are not so many gypsy entrepreneurs here. But in the end, I convinced someone to give me the loan, and I'm quite proud to have my own business. At first, in 2017, I was alone, and I only repaired bikes. The venue was good, and people from the NGO also promoted me on the internet, so I began having clientele. Then, the next year I had the idea to extend my business by selling used bikes, which was somewhat new in the city, and then I contacted some vendors and I began selling new bikes, mostly on demand. I hired a couple of people and moved the business in a bigger place, and now we are also selling some electric scooters besides bikes. Now I have 4 employees, most of them working both in sales and in repairing bikes and scooters. The business is doing OK, but it could be better. Yet, Romanians are too lazy to leave their car, even when the weather is good, so the state should push them to do so, like they did in other countries, where using your car is really expensive. We also need more bike paths in this city, there are some on the major streets, but if you want to go elsewhere you are obliged to go among cars, which is dangerous, or on the sidewalk together with pedestrians, and that can be dangerous as well. "I hope the mayor office will realise that without making it easier for bikers, many people won't just take the chance of using bicycles instead of cars, especially if it is so troublesome to bike in the city." Many of the people I know mostly use their bikes in the weekend and mostly around the city, on the surrounding hills. They would be open towards using it to go to work as well, but that's too

hard now. And of course, that would mean more business for workshops like mine. The electric scooters for rent, after they were introduced in the city two years ago, have brought a change to the good, as many people try them and they realise that it's possible to move around differently than using a car. And maybe some of them will buy a bike or a scooter of their own as a result.

Quotes

The cities in the Netherlands are much less noisy than ours, and you feel more relaxed because of that, and more in contact with the nature and the people around. Here, the streets are crowded with cars, all discharging smoke and making noise. This is very far away from nature.

I hope the mayor office will realise that without making it easier for bikers, many people won't just take the chance of using bicycles instead of cars, especially if it is so troublesome to bike in the city.

Keywords

Ethnic minority, bicycle, workshop, inspiring experiences abroad, scooters

RL4_RO06, Romania, The eco-friendly restaurant

Narrative

I am a 26-year-old woman, not married, who owns and manages a vegetarian restaurant by applying a sustainable approach to the food business. After graduating from the university, I worked in the management of another restaurant, a regular one, which served even fast-food recipes. That was before the pandemic. During the two years I worked there I was appalled by the amount of waste produced even in a small restaurant, with 12 tables. Moreover, the owner was not interested in recycling, he only did the minimum in order to avoid fines, so I realised that even a small place like that has an enormous impact on the environment. Another issue was the food itself, as I saw it from the kitchen, which was produced in an industrial manner, with the lowest-quality ingredients and no care about their source. I found the whole scenario to be repelling, and I was not at all emotionally affected when that restaurant closed down, as many others did, during the

COVID pandemic. I spent some time at home, with my parents, while also talking to some friends who had already been engaged in pro-environmental initiatives, for instance planting trees or collecting garbage from the river surface in the mountains. I had the idea to open up my own restaurant, which would be the opposite to the one I had worked in. That also implies vegetarian, as I stopped eating meat five years ago, both for health reasons and out of concerns for the sake of the animals sacrificed in the food industry. My parents are very open-minded, and they liked my idea. They even offered a financial support to open the business, but I also took a bank loan. I was also helped by friends in finding a good and cheap place to rent, which was not so difficult after a year of pandemic. They also helped me rearrange the place. As I had experience as a restaurant manager, I quite knew the procedures and the things I needed to take care of, so we were able to open in the beginning of 2022. There are 8 employees. So far, it's going better than expected, the clientele is growing. We serve slow-food, using traditional ways of cooking and authentic recipes, organic and fresh ingredients. Also, we only serve freshly cooked food, only the food that we have cooked during that day, so that we limit our need to consume electrical power by refrigerating it overnight. This also makes our food tastier than in other restaurants, and most of our clients choose to come to us for this and because they know that we are using a pro-environmental approach to cooking. Another dimension of our ecological way of our approach is that we only serve meat-free dishes, which not only saves animals, but also reduces the carbon footprint of our business. Moreover, we try to use only local ingredients. From the beginning we decided to use organic ingredients, and it wasn't easy when we started to find them in the region. Even now we struggle with this. Sometimes we need to change recipes because there are certain vegetables that should have been delivered in a certain quantity, but we receive a lower amount, so we have to manage with what we have. We also cook international dishes, like tortilla, but adapted to our food culture, so that we don't need to use any ingredient that is not grown in the region. We also try to limit the waste we produce as much as possible; our intention is to move towards producing no waste, by implementing a sustainable management of waste. To this aim, we have collected separately all waste from the beginning, and we try to use things that we can recycle. We choose to buy non-wrapped ingredients, or wrapped in recyclable materials instead of plastic, and in bulk instead of packaged whenever possible. We don't offer plastic flatware or single use plastic food containers for takeaway food, instead we wrap it in reusable recipients like glass jars. We also collect our organic waste and transport it to a nearby farm, where they make compost from it, and this also means that we have basically no food waste. I believe that our life on earth should be sustainable, we should protect nature for the next generation, and I hope our restaurant and approach will inspire others to become more responsible towards the environment. "We are in the food business, but others who we inspire work in another type of companies, and they could apply the same principles in what they do, for instance they may use more eco-friendly ways of transportation, or could recycle more, and that would lead, step by step, to having a cleaner air and a more preserved nature." And luckily there are many people who share this perspective and who come to eat in our restaurant knowing that we have a place aligned with these principles. As hinders of our activity, I would mention the repeated hassles that we have been obliged to manage from the state institutions. It happened several times to be met with disbelief when I was saying that I was the owner of the business, they thought I am the daughter of the owner, and someone in a local administration office even told me that he

would prefer to talk to my father. We had to get a lot of clearances and official approvals in order to be allowed to begin our restaurant business, and in some cases the files we had to prepare were quite big. For instance, we have had a lot of trouble getting the clearance from the National Fire Protection Agency. But that is something that all restaurants have to put up with, as well with the unpredictable taxes on small businesses, which the politicians decide to raise or introduce from time to time. What I think may be a bit exaggerated in our case are the repeated Controls from the Consumers Protection Agency that we have had. “They are more scrupulous because we serve eco-friendly and organic food, as if that would imply that we are not taking care of the health of our customers and we do not take all measures to respect the sanitary conditions that should be kept in a restaurant.”

Quotes

We are in the food business, but others who we inspire work in another type of companies, and they could apply the same principles in what they do, for instance they may use more eco-friendly ways of transportation, or could recycle more, and that would lead, step by step, to having a cleaner air and a more preserved nature.

They are more scrupulous because we serve eco-friendly food, as if that would imply that we are not taking care of the health of our customers and we do not take all measures to respect the sanitary conditions that should be kept in a restaurant.

Keywords

Restaurant, vegetarian, organic, waste management, sustainable ingredients

RL4_RO07, Romania, The struggles of developing a nature tourism company

Narrative

I am a 33-year-old woman, married, two children. My parents are big nature lovers, so they took me hiking on all the mountains in Romania ever since I was a kid and then during my teenage years. That’s how I came to learn a lot about mountain nature and to be really fond of it. For me this is the best way to live your life, to explore and enjoy what nature has to offer. My husband is also passionate about mountain trips and explorations.

We have been together since college years, and we have done a lot of mountain walking, the both of us and then, once the kids came, together with them, even carrying them along mountain paths. We are both working as school teachers, and the salaries are quite low, and have been like that since we signed up, with little prospects of significant increases. As we have gathered so much experience in nature, we had the idea to make some profit out of it by taking a second job in our small business, which we opened six years ago. We offer excursions and camps, of two kinds. First, we organise nature walking treks and walks on the hills surrounding the city. We do one-day trips with children, of course for a small fee, we take them to interesting natural places around and explain to them things about nature, as well as the ways in which it has suffered because of humans, especially due to pollution. Many parents join us as well, and they become very interested both in the places and in our stories. Many people, even from those born here, have little knowledge of the nature around the city. Secondly, we have connections with pensions and small hotels where we have stayed across the years, located in four mountain areas, and we offer trips and camps there. We organise them differently from the usual trips in natural surroundings that most people take nowadays, in which they actually explore only the close surroundings of the pension or the hotel where they stay. Instead, we have guided tours of several hours of trekking, adapted to the fitness conditions and the choices of our customers. We also offer children camps during the summer and winter holidays, with many outdoor activities included, organised by our hosts and the people in the pensions that we involve, and also with some mountain walks, including in the winter. We even got the accreditation as mountain guides for this, in order to have all the mandatory conditions fulfilled, and in the hope that we could receive some support for our work. We have repeatedly talked to people in the County School Inspectorate proposing them to promote our services in local schools, as an initiative aiming towards offering environmental education to children, while keeping the fees of our offer at a very low level. We thought that this could be a way to get ourselves known. But we received no support, as we were told that they couldn't help us without an official clearance from the Ministry of Education. We tried to talk to people there as well, but we received no answer. It's hard to get into the already established network of touristic offers in schools, ran by people in charge of or connected to the system. So, we advertised in the parents' groups in the schools where our children study, and through word of mouth we have had some success. We would like to extend our business, but it's hard, firstly because most of the children camps we organise are during school holidays. We hire some young people during those times to help us with the kids, but they are only temporarily hired. "In order to have a continuous workflow we would need to organise adult trips, but we don't have enough customers for that yet, as most Romanians are used to go to the pension only to eat, drink and stay on the terrace." This consequently limits our possibilities to develop. For instance, we applied for funding to a state program offering support to small businesses, but the fact that we couldn't guarantee to create stable, year-round jobs costs us points in the evaluation, so we didn't receive any funds. Because of the low financial resources, we are also incurring higher costs in other regards, especially in transporting people. "Specifically, we rent coach buses from a travel agency, since we haven't had the money to buy our own; this makes us still, as one could say, less than micro enterprise." This makes us frustrated, because we believe we are offering an important service, providing opportunities for getting in contact with nature and for environmental education, but society, in effect the state, does not seem to appreciate

it. Since the regular one-day trips that we do can't bring us a great deal of profit, we couldn't survive only from the income that this business brings, so we both kept our teacher jobs and we feel we're doing this alternative activity as a hobby mostly.

Quotes

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Specifically, we rent coach buses from a travel agency, since we haven't had the money to buy our own; this makes us still, as one could say, less than micro enterprise.

Keywords

Nature hikes, camps, low state support, access to funding, eco-tourism

RL4_RO08, Romania, Searching for energy saving solutions in the graphic design business

Narrative

I am a 42-year-old woman, married, I have a teenage daughter. I studied history in the university, but I couldn't find a proper job in the field. During my student years I also had a job in marketing, first a part time job and then it became a full time one, especially since I also began working in the photo editing software for clients, doing posters and adverts. For the past five years I have been co-managing, as development manager, a company that creates educational content for children across the world, mostly in English. The company now has 18 employees. We collaborate with other companies and studios in other countries, and our main target age is preschool. We generate animation, and this requires a very high computing power in order for these animations to be rendered, as well as a long loading time. This implies a very high consumption of energy, both for the servers and for the graphic workstation units on which my colleagues work. This is something general in our area of business, but two years ago we needed to extend our capacity of data processing in order to obtain a better performance in terms of animation rendering times. So we bought at the beginning of 2021, through a business-developing

project, a modern technical room with servers and data storage and processing systems, a dedicated technical solution. Later we noticed that this investment increases our power consumption 10 times, and consequently what we had gained in terms of execution times we were paying monthly on electricity. Of course, we decided to find a solution to diminish these costs, so we looked for governmental aids directed towards increasing the energy efficiency of businesses. But we soon realised that the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy involved is huge, and that we don't have the time needed to invest in the actual endeavour of submitting the applications. So, we gave up several applications. "Another important problem in this respect is the irrational requirements that we should have fulfilled in order to receive funding. One application that we began preparing concerned funding company for buying and installing solar panels. During the process we discovered that one of the requirements was that the building facility to be equipped should not be at the same time the registered office of the business, which is so absurd that made us think that someone forgot to delete it from another project application template." Then we searched for ways to cut down our energy consumption, and we located an animation rendering system that would cut it by half. We also identified a state funding program to buy it, but again we abandoned the idea because of another out of place requirement. Specifically, we were required to guarantee that the new equipment would increase our economic performance by 40%, which is something nobody can take up the risk of signing for. Now we are studying the available opportunities and we try to prepare ourselves and to anticipate these options better. We thought about contracting firms that are specialised in getting funds for companies, but from what I know there's no guarantee that you will receive funding even this way, as many of these companies are understaffed for the amount of workload that needs to be done in this area. But we found things we can do on our own, or with lower external support. For instance, next year we'll change the rendering technology we use, by switching to Unreal Engine rendering, and this will reduce our impact on the environment by nearly 80%. This would be valuable for us not only from the financial point of view, but also because environmental protection is important for our company. "We evangelise these eco-friendly principles in the content we produce for kids, in order to educate them in this direction and in this spirit, so we try to transpose it in our daily activity as well." Me and my colleagues talk about this, and it is personally relevant, we feel quite proud that we create such an eco-friendly educational avenue, and we encourage our children to watch the animation that we do. But it is not easy to be eco-friendly in our field of work, as there are two main options available that would reduce the environmental impact of the business, both really costly and challenging. The first is to change the technology used in order to increase energy efficiency, which can mean decreasing energy consumption up to 50%. But the costs involved are huge, so you can't really do it without external funding. The second is to integrate a green energy solution, which at the moment has a profitability margin that is hard to calculate arithmetically, but from I can estimate it involves a pay-off period of about 7 to 10 years. I know many people and business in our field, and for all of us these considerations about energy consumption and bills are very important, because they can greatly increase the operating costs of the business, thus decreasing profit margins or even making the company unprofitable in comparison to other players. Consequently, most of us try to find funding for this type of energy efficiency measures, but for most, I would say 95%, the motivation in this direction is mostly economic, and less related to



ecology or environmental ethics. But I think that if the outcome of these initiatives is good for the environment, the ethics behind them is less important.

Quotes

Another important problem in this respect is the irrational requirements that we should have fulfilled in order to receive funding. One application that we began preparing concerned funding company for buying and installing solar panels. During the process we discovered that one of the requirements was that the building facility to be equipped should not be at the same time the registered office of the business, which is so absurd that made us think that someone forgot to delete it from another project application template.

We evangelise these eco-friendly principles in the content we produce for kids, in order to educate them in this direction and in this spirit, so we try to transpose it in our daily activity as well.

Keywords

Energy saving solutions, funding, solar panels, eco-friendly

RL4_RO09, Romania, The regular restaurant

Narrative

I am a 44-year-old woman, married, I have two children. I opened a restaurant in February 2022, after preparing the business since the autumn of 2021. Before this I worked in restaurant management for 10 years, and in 2021 I decided to open my own restaurant. My husband also has his own business, we had raised some money and decided to invest it in this new venture. It wasn't easy, especially at first, that's why it took longer to open up than I expected. I just couldn't find the time to take care of all things that had to be solved, and also take care of the kids. But I managed in the end. I have 11 employees, three quarters of whom are women. What we do in terms of environmental protection is first to make sure we take all the mandatory measures to the full extent, especially those regarding the selective collection of waste. This is mandatory under current regulations, and restaurants that are discovered that they do not collect selectively are, at least hypothetically, fined. Besides that, we contracted a company that collects our used oil and that probably receives some funding from the state, as we receive 5 litres of palm oil for a

50 litres barrel of used oil. And this kind of reward incentives you to be careful and collect all the oil after using. I think that all restaurant owners do the same, by doing things that help you in some way in return. Few of them do such pro-environmental things because their conscience motivates them to do as such, especially since these things can incur very high costs. For instance, before this energy crisis few people were thinking about replacing their kitchen equipment with more eco-friendly technologies, but as these new technologies consume less energy, I have heard other people in this business analysing these eco-friendly options. On the other hand, they can be very expensive, so if the entrepreneurs were to be supported to buy them many restaurants would have them. And that would be good for the environment, but at the same time for the business, as entrepreneurs are mostly interested in profitability. What we do besides the mandatory measures is first to closely monitor the cooking process in order to limit waste; and second, I contracted another company that picks up our plastic waste and that recycles it. We do not pay for this service, but I don't know many other places that do this, since it is easier to just leave plastic alongside the other trash and have the municipal garbage collecting company pick it up. I chose to make sure that the plastic we waste, which is a lot, really gets recycled. The reason is that I really believe climate change exists, it's becoming visible, and I'm disgusted by the way in which many fellow citizens undermine or make fun of this issue. Generally in our country, and particularly in the business environment, at least mine, the environmental measures that need to be taken, like reducing one's carbon footprint, are much less important for regular people than at the international or European level. "For the Romanian entrepreneurs these problems don't exist. They see the legal requirements of environmental protection as obligations and chores imposed by the state and that incur them additional costs, besides the regular taxes and mandatory investments." But there is no conscience about the need to save the planet or the possibility that these obligations might contribute towards protecting nature. The only motivation is the threat of being fined in case they do not take those mandatory measures. On the other hand, the laws are made only to coerce, without any factor that convince people that those measures are right or necessary in themselves. Only by regulating and fining you can't expect people to develop any motivation towards that action. And the way the institutions in charge communicate on these topics is also very problematic, as they do not explain the importance of those actions. "Information on environmental protection in general is miscommunicated in Romania; if you stick a poster on a trash bin you can't expect people to really read it and change their minds about how important is to protect nature." So, there is no efficient communication from the state, and I believe this stems from the fact that they themselves do not have a genuine concern about the environment, they just feign it because of the European commitments that they have signed. But there is no true intention to change things for the better. Or maybe they just haven't worked with competent marketing specialists. Moreover, the regulations don't offer any incentive for doing the right thing. This would motivate again people, more than using only the fear of being fined if you are caught during official inspections that you disobeyed the law, which only makes people to disobey it when they are sure that they won't be caught. And this happens in the way of doing business here: entrepreneurs focus on trying to adapt to the system and to dodge the rules whenever possible, because this would cut their expenses. And the most important thing in order to avoid fines is that things look good on paper, because usually this is the essential check during inspections. In the restaurant business area, some of the environmental protection measures are not

very expensive, but most entrepreneurs do not take them because they lack the awareness that they are necessary, and that is a result that the state manages these issues, as I detailed above.

Quotes

For the Romanian entrepreneurs these problems don't exist. They see the legal requirements of environmental protection as obligations and chores imposed by the state and that incur them additional costs, besides the regular taxes and mandatory investments.

Information on environmental protection in general is miscommunicated in Romania; if you stick a poster on a trash bin you can't expect people to really read it and change their minds about how important is to protect nature.

Keywords

Restaurant, environmental protection state management, fines, incentives, waste management

RL4_RO10, Romania, The honey packing business

Narrative

I am a 66-year-old man, married with no children. I live in the outskirts of the city, and I was a primary school teacher for all my professional life. I lived in the city until retiring last year, but I have also had a house in the countryside, in a village nearby, which was my old parents' house. My parents had beehives, and I took this interest from my father, who taught me all the secrets of beekeeping. So, four years ago, in 2018, I opened a business in this area, with three employees. We only pack and sell honey in its raw natural state, without any processing, pasteurising and with no additives. Moreover, we don't heat the honey when filtering it, in order not to lower its qualities. I want my honey to be as natural as possible, as I believe we are too exposed already to artificial components in our food. We also sell other products from bees besides honey, mainly pollen and propolis. First, my business entails collecting honey from beekeepers. I have contracted several beekeepers in the area, in our county and in the surrounding ones, residing further away

from the city, and who take their hives in remote fields. Then we filter it and we put it in jars, and then it is ready to be delivered. We have several regular customers in the city, some grocery stores and a supermarket, but we also have orders from other cities across the country. The workload varies both with the seasons and with the amount of products that we have to prepare. We have a storage facility, but sometimes we need to supplement what we have by collecting more honey during a short time interval. We don't actually deliver the products, our customers or intermediaries come and pick up their orders. Also, we receive all jars already labelled, we contracted a local packaging company that delivers them to us. In terms of environmental impact, we do not generate much waste in our production and packaging process, except for the wrappings in which the jars are delivered, and glass waste when some of the jars are broken. But even so we follow closely the regulations concerning selective collecting, we have bins in which we deposit them separately and the local waste services company takes them. What I have been thinking to do in addition is to replace the current traditional heating system of the building in which we operate, which is wood based, with a less polluting energy source, such as solar panels that we could install on the rooftop or ground source heat pumps. I know there are governmental funds for that, with EU money, which is great, as you can install solar panels for free, I have a relative who did that. But I haven't had the time to explore the subject, to document on how exactly these funds can be accessed. I know that everything is on the internet, but I am not from the internet generation, and I'm quite slow in using it. My conclusion so far is that the initiative of funding solar panels is very good, but the way it is implemented is, as usual in Romania, is extremely bureaucratic. And it also lacks transparency, in the sense that is not enough to put some information on the internet and to believe that all people will know how to find it and to understand what they have to do. For instance, I came across some documents issued by the government on funds for installing solar panels, and some were 60 pages long, with many technical notions. There is also the need to explain the advantages of these options that you offer, so that people would see the benefit of investing their time and effort in preparing their paperwork. "I'm asking myself: I would have to search for the information and read for several days, and then prepare my file, which probably I wouldn't know how to do, for what? What would be the benefits that I would get if I invest this time and effort?". There is no advertising of these projects, that would convince people that they are worthwhile. Consequently, I think that companies that access these funds are very large businesses, with many employees, which can afford to take one or two employees from their regular work and ask them to look for and study the information and requirements, and to prepare the paperwork. In a small enterprise such as mine, that is impossible, as all employees have something to do most of the time in order to keep the business going. Another option is to contract a company that prepares the paperwork for such governmental funds, generally those that deal with the implementation of European funding. From what I know, you should pay them on the spot for preparing your file, and they also receive some money once the application is approved. But I didn't want to go this way, because of my relative's experience in the process of applying for solar panel funding. First, he studied the topic, so he had the basic knowledge, and then he contracted and paid one of these firms, which prepared his application file. After submitting the file, the governmental agency asked him for some more papers or clarifications, but nobody in that firm answered the phone anymore, and he couldn't find them. So, he went to another firm, paid again for the service and finally had his application completed. In the end, the funds

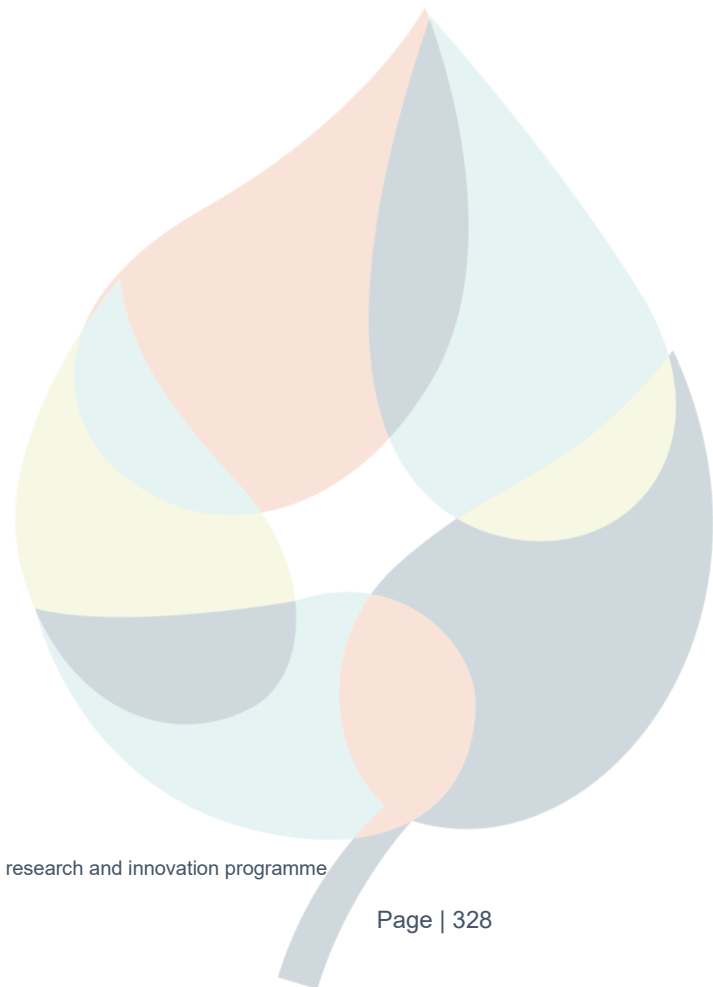
were approved, but it took more than a year for the solar panels to be actually bought and installed. To conclude, the idea to fund solar panels is good, but the bureaucracy keeps away many potential beneficiaries, like myself, in general the people who don't have the time, experience, patience or the employees to read the rules and prepare their application file.

Quotes

I'm asking myself: I would have to search for the information and read for several days, and then prepare my file, which probably I wouldn't know how to do, for what? What would be the benefits that I would get if I invest this time and effort?

Keywords

Raw honey, packing, solar panels, bureaucracy, state mismanagement



Research Line 5: Improving food security and healthy diets in vulnerable communities, through local production, informed consumption practices and circularity

RL5_SE01, Sweden, Young mother trying to live plastic-free and ecological within boundaries of time and life realities

Narrative

I am a 30-year-old female with bisexual orientation, married to a male. Only a few weeks ago, our first child was born whom I am currently taking care of alone because my husband had to move abroad for work reasons; I will follow him in two months and we will stay there for a year. Paradoxically, living alone with the new-born right now, it costs me more money to buy food than eating out and I also produce less waste in this way. But usually, when we live together my husband and I eat together and about 90 percent of it is home cooked food. At lunch, we often eat at work in the restaurants/canteens with our colleagues, since the menus tend to be quite good and affordable. I eat basically no fruit or vegetables, we eat about once a week fish, usually a fish-and-chips kind which we then prepare in the oven, sometimes we eat chicken (maybe one or two times a week), and very seldom we cook red meat. Usually, we cook red meat only when preparing ragout, stew, chili or so, which is very few times a month. My favourite meals are baked potatoes, sushi and bread, but none of these I know how to prepare myself (incl. how to handle fresh fish) and I don't have a passion for cooking, so I have to rely on bought versions. My husband likes cooking, but when working late, me and also him might just want a quick meal often.

I realised that I spend quite much money, more than average people, on food, at least as far as what I know from my family. But I want to buy ecological, sustainable and

high-quality food which often – though not always – comes hand in hand, and food is not something I would want to compromise on. I am fine with spending more money for it.

While I was pregnant, I learned more about vitamins, minerals, how to take them in to actually absorb them, etc. But I realise that I am lacking food literacy quite much; though I am actually also not sure if I want to know too many details as I fear to therewith run the risk of getting triggered into eating disorders or so. I see how almost every woman I know around me has or had at some point an eating disorder.

Before moving out and living alone, I actually did not know that many dishes can be cooked from scratch, since I grew up in a family that relied mainly on processed, ready-made foods. And I think it is related to culture but also to laziness stirred by the mere presence of those foods and their cheapness. I also think that it is related much to class, education and capitalism, meaning that rich families can also often afford having someone at home to cook. Moreover, there is a social stigma around certain kinds of food, often with half-baked, ambiguous talks around it. For example, preparing premade meals when rich is kind of glamorous, while when doing that as a poor person it is stigmatised as laziness.

I've been vegetarian for seven years, but I stopped at some point when I was living abroad and aimed for a certain kind of career in which, I realised, it would be difficult to convey in a diplomatic way that I eat vegetarian, and also without leaving the air of coming from a place of privilege where people can afford eating vegan or vegetarian. So I focused on eating what was mostly local. Nonetheless, I eat very little meat because I don't like the taste very much. Also, if I was single I could probably give up eating meat tomorrow and be vegetarian again; but my husband eats meat and we eat together. For him it is also more difficult to give up on meat, even if he agrees that eating meat comes with many problems and it would be better not to do. But he seems more attached to culturally entrenched dishes, like lamb, which in his culture is important (he is half Greek, half Swede).

When it comes to recommendations and information about sustainability issues regarding food, I usually get it from my friends, and I look at the packaging. I don't like things that are packaged in plastic, so I look for unwrapped/unpackaged things or things packaged in biologically degradable wrapping; and I look for unknown brands. My thought or principles is that it starts from the thinking behind: I mean, even if something says all over it is "eco" but is from Nestlé, it is probably a greenwashing thing. Or also more generally, if eco is packaged in plastic or comes from the other side of the Globe, there does not seem to be a big thinking or real intention behind it from the company that produced it.

In Sweden I buy food in supermarkets because there is no farmers market, but when I am back in Italy I go to farmers markets, which I like a lot. Here where I live right now, we have a bodega and a supermarket within walking distance, but the supermarket is a bit expensive compared to the ones I used to go to at the place we lived before. Also, I like going to Lidl, but now it is not possible anymore to go there with my kick-scooter having the kid and seeing the distance. I think I miss it because it reminds me of home, and also, they often have products made in Italy.

I dislike food waste very much, but when I was pregnant and living alone right now, I realise that I waste food a bit, so I am currently trying to be more careful again. But often portion sizes for one person are really hard to use up, so I try to fully avoid certain purchases right now if possible. Pregnancy made me change several habits, for example I

had to be more careful about not eating things that are not perfectly fine anymore; and living alone now I changed my tendency to do one large to several small groceries per week. Main obstacles to make our food consumption more environmentally friendly and healthy are time to prepare more things from scratch, space to store food, and a garden to grow food. I would love to have a greenhouse to grow food, and learn more how to do so (and have the time for it).

Quotes

Not all high quality food is also ecological but usually most ecological things are high quality.

A problem is that a lot of things are produced and they should not be produced because they have no reason to exist - like why do you need a box imported from another continent that only contains corn if you can also just buy corn?

It's trashy if your poor, but it's glamorous when you're rich cooking premade meals.

Keywords

Organic, unpackaged, food literacy, culture, cultural culinary traditions, time, money, class, privilege, vegetarian, child, childhood experiences

RL5_SE02, Sweden, Single-father buying on stock to keep costs low but afford healthy and vegetarian eating

Narrative

I am a 37 single father with one child that is about to turn four in a few months. I live alone with him in a two-room apartment, but my sister is my neighbour and my father lives close, too. I like cooking very much and I like cooking interesting new stuff. I tend to try to have a lot of food at home always, which I mostly buy when it is on sale so that I then have it when I need it later on, instead of having to buy everything right when I need it, which might be more costly. The main challenges I face to make my family's eating habits more environmentally friendly and healthy are related to money. I have to choose food a lot based on cost rather than as to what I want to buy, and I spend a lot of energy trying to

find the best balance between cheap yet decent and healthy food. I don't like buying ecological food at all, I'm very much against it because I think the biggest environmental problem with food production on the whole, not on specific items, is land use and ecological food has a huge land footprint. So I try to avoid it if I can, which is convenient from an economic side too. But sometimes I have to buy more expensive items, since I also try not to buy from companies when they do really crappy things, like supporting anthroposophy and anti-vaccers. I eat vegetarian, my son too. For some time I ate vegan, since my ex-partner made this a requirement, but after we split I found the vegetarian diet a perfect balance between feeling healthy and still ethically right. Still, I try to avoid dairy products as much as I can and buy only ecological eggs. In my everyday life, what I cook is a bit like a balance between what my son demands and trying to get everything he needs in the food, as well as trying to indulge in my love of cooking new things. I look what we have at home and based on that become creative. Unfortunately, I cannot fully avoid food waste, e.g. if my son did not eat as much as anticipated, or when I forgot to freeze certain food in time. In general I very much dislike waste, like I buy everything second hand, both for economic reasons but also because I hate the whole idea of buying and throwing away stuff all the time, including food. I understand why a lot of waste happens throughout the chain, but things could be done much better. I also buy a lot where the packaging is not nice because that's in higher risk of getting thrown out otherwise. I think that's silly, who cares if the carton is a bit broken. I also try to buy stuff without unnecessary plastic packaging or so, which is another kind of waste.

When it comes to the people around me, my close family does not think much about the ecological angle of food, my father is more on the track that one should eat much meat. I have some in the extended family who are more active in thinking ecologically, but my close family not so much, though they like the idea of sustainable farming instead of factory farming, buying from regional farmers. Information about what is healthy and environmentally friendly food I get from the internet, like posts that pique my interest and I then try to find out a bit more so I can have an informed opinion, Otherwise I try to just use common sense as well, like if you can buy something local it's good to do, but I also know that this is not as one-dimensional, and it is hard to know really what is best and to research everything. In addition, there is so many organisations and people that have an agenda and spread information skewed to their interests. So I just use some common sense and best guesses.

Right now, my biggest worry are the rising food prices and how they will force me to further restrict what and how much food I can buy; in the long term, it is worrying that Sweden has such low self-sustainability. I try for that reason to keep a lot of dry food extra at home, so in case of temporary problems I have reserves. I think I could live about a month of the food I have stored at home.

Quotes

I spend a lot of energy trying to find the best balance there the cheapest option I can find that still decent and then trying to sprinkle in more healthy stuff that's still not too expensive to make up for not being able to buy whatever I want all the time.

I buy a lot of stuff when it's extra cheap, so I have it and then the majority of the cooking is based on looking OK what have I gotten before that I can use as a base and then try to buy just the fresh stuff that I will need to do something with those things I would have at home.

My dad always, always tries to explain to me why vegetarianism is a bad idea and why we should be eating meat as much as possible. So we always have that discussion come up every single time it's about food.

I've moderated it a bit to vegetarianism, and I feel extremely good at that point. It feels like the sweet spot for me. Now I don't feel this bad conscience (...).

Keywords

Money, food stock, prices, vegetarianism, vegan, self-sustainability, food prep, child, social media, waste, packaging, second hand, cultural culinary traditions

RL5_SE03, Sweden, “There are always alternatives, you just need to use your imagination”

Narrative

My name is Paula, I am 62 years old, and I work as an assistant nurse in Örebro, Sweden where I engage in issues related to nutrition and food habits. I live with my husband with whom I have two children. Both our kids have left home and started their own families, so now me and my husband live alone.

My husband works night shifts and I work daily from Monday to Friday. We split the home duties between us, including shopping and cooking. We help each other a lot. I would prefer we'd eat more greens and vegetables, whereas my husband is more in preference of meat. In my opinion we should eat less meat in general, I don't think it's necessary to eat that much meat when there is so much healthy vegetarian food – which is also a better alternative for the environment.

I like vegetarian alternatives, also at home. But then my husband misses the meat. Apart from our diverse food preferences in the family, I don't identify that many problems related to food habits. Sometimes the price is affecting my choices in the food market, of course. Some products, not least the ecological ones, are very expensive and then I need to rethink and decide for another recipe. I think these high prices are problematic, but

there are always alternatives; you just need to be creative and open to adjust your food preferences.

I have always been very aware of what I eat, and I have always tried to choose healthy and environmentally friendly foods, although I am more prone to choosing ecological products now, compared to 30 years ago.

Maybe that I think more about organic food now than I have done in the past, probably because there is a lot of talk about it these days. I always try to choose Swedish produced foods, and foods that are in season. I hear so many bad things about Danish meat, for example, so I try to avoid that and instead buy locally produced foods.

You sometimes hear that there can be antibiotics in Danish meat and from other countries, so I actually avoid that. Or we avoid that. We prefer to buy what is Swedish [produced]. I am very thankful to people at my work, from whom I learn a lot about healthy and environmentally friendly food habits. We often share information and ideas in how we can sustain an environmentally sustainable as well as healthy lifestyle. We also share recipes with one another which is very inspiring and useful when you run out of ideas in the kitchen. I appreciate this sharing of ideas and knowledge a lot, and I try to pass it further on to my friends and family. I also receive a lot of information from my niece who is very knowledgeable about animal rights. She is rather extreme in her approach, she only eats venison for example, and only if she can assure that the animal was treated well. I learn a lot from her, although I am sometimes cautious about the source of information.

Taken together, apart from the price aspect, I would say that I am rather happy with how I manage to sustain healthy and sustainable food habits. Of course, I would wish for ecological alternatives to be cheaper so that these good products become more accessible, but from my perspective there are always ways to find cheaper, but still healthy and sustainable alternatives. You just need to use your imagination.

Quotes

I also have a niece who is interested in animal rights, and she comes up with [information] how chickens are treated and so on. She sends [information] from time to time. But you don't know how much of it is true.

We throw away almost nothing, I would say. It would be if you happen to forget something in the fridge and you see that it has really gone bad. Otherwise, we can drink milk that is many weeks old.

If you make mincemeat sauce, you can always grate carrots and replace some of the meat with carrots. In that way you dilute the sauce.

Keywords

Imagination, vegetarian, meat eating, high prices, locally produced, sharing ideas, social influences, partner support

RL5_SE04, Sweden, Foreign student living in a living experiment and exploring ways to avoid food waste

Narrative

I'm 24 years old, live in Stockholm but am originally from another European country, where I grew up in a very small village. I am studying biology with a focus on the environment and a bit of sustainability. I live in the city centre in a rather expensive neighbourhood, but in a co-living with about 50 other people, which feels like a living experiment. When it comes to food, I tend to look spontaneously at what I feel like eating and then I go to the supermarket every 2nd or 3rd day. I eat mainly vegetarian and lots of vegetables. I would say I never throw food away, it is never the case that my vegetables go bad or anything. I think I'd rather eat it before it gets thrown away and I find it rather unnecessary. I think I have a pretty good overview of how much I buy, how much I need, and I also try to avoid plastic, for example. If I have the choice between somehow, I don't know, tomatoes packaged in plastic or loose, then I try to buy the loose ones. I would like to buy regional and seasonal, but it is usually the price that is the deciding factor for me and I take the product that is maybe cheaper instead of what is regional.

Here in the house where I live it's very cool because we have shared fridges and if you have something that you don't use up, then you put it in there and other people can take it. I also use the app "too good to go" a lot, because it's cheap, which is good for me, and you usually get very, very good, very fresh food that would otherwise go bad. I think there are many good alternatives to avoid food waste. But I think there are also many people who are not very aware or who don't care how much food they throw away. My mum has her own garden and grows a lot herself and I think she is aware of what environmentally friendly means, and she also makes sure to buy seasonal things and not the most exotic things. I have a big sister, and I think we all eat very consciously and also pay attention to what we eat. I think we are also a bit aware of that food has an effect on the environment. So, I think we are all on a relatively similar level. With my friends too. But I think I'm in a bubble of people who pay a lot of attention to the environmental effects of food, though it's not that it always is a topic of our conversations.

I would say that my awareness of the environment-food link has mainly developed in the last few years seeing that climate change is here, with extreme drought and flooding in my home country for example. With that, you realise that events like this are becoming more and more frequent and I think that makes me realise, ok, what can we do somehow to take a better path in order to still be able to feed people in the future or that we still have areas where we can live.

As regards the information about what to eat or avoid, in the summer I did an internship at WWF and they had a website where you can look at different foods and see

what kind of impact they have. I really like sites like that, where you can just google or look at what is a good food that does not have such a big impact, and what is a bad one. I think I inform myself, but it could also be more. Thinking about the future, I think the biggest fear is not knowing whether it will be possible to feed all the people in the future, also because of the changing climate and the growing population. But I, well, I guess that it will probably not affect me personally that much, but of course it would be good if we could ensure that anyway. What gives me a bit of hope is that I personally notice that many people are dealing with this, doing research and considering what possibilities there are for securing food in the future.

Quotes

I think I rarely have any obstacles when it comes to environmentally friendly, except now when it comes to packaging and stuff like availability.

Drought and floods and one notices already, such events become ever more frequent and thereby I believe I become conscious about, ok, what can we do to somehow find a better way to feed people in the future or that we still have areas where we can live.

Keywords

Food waste apps, shared fridges, sense of needs, student, avoiding plastic, affordability, availability, upbringing

RL5_SE05, Sweden, Single mother just trying to feed her six kids

Narrative

I am a 32-year-young single mother of six kids, I am a nurse, and we live in an apartment in Örebro. We have breakfast and at least dinner together and I try to cook once a day. It is me who usually cooks and gets the food, though my oldest, which is 10 years old, is starting to prepare food once a week and some breakfasts, too. I usually get the food from the supermarket, sometimes I also order since food for seven we need a lot. Sometimes I buy eggs from farmer, and if I could afford it I would buy meat from a farmer, but that is expensive. So right now, I buy it all at big and affordable stores. I usually cook food like

spaghetti, lasagne or tacos, something with some carbs and some meat, something that the kids like, what keeps them fed for some time, and which is not expensive.

In the family with me and the kids, we have similar views on food, but in my extended family we have different views. My dad is very into low carb, so he does not eat any carbs or sugar and he wants us to eat more fat and protein, and I probably would if I could afford that. But with six kids you have to like put in some potatoes and pasta too afford, and I also think the kids need some carbs too. But other than that, I think we are on the same page.

The main challenge for me to make my family's eating habits healthier and maybe also more environmentally friendly is money. If I had more money to care about that stuff, I would buy more eco-friendly, local food. But I don't have that luxury to choose right now, though in periods in the past I did. But now, I just have to go with what's the most food for the money. Yet, I don't want to buy the cheapest if I know it is from a country where a lot of toxic substances are in the, e.g., fruits. Then I won't buy that; so I have to weight over like they are not expensive but not too toxic. I also don't want to buy too much food that I know is processed, like containing many e-numbers and other stuff in the food that is not supposed to be there. I also try that we eat not too many carbs or sugary stuff.

When it comes to food waste, I am trying to not waste too much, but we waste some food. I should get better at it, but I'm not so good at it. A barrier next to money is furthermore time. Time to do the research, and time to prepare the food.

I would say Information about what food is for example healthy, affordable, or ecological, I get from social media and from relationships mostly. However, I do not think that it is necessary to change the diet for the environment that much. But what I think is important is to consider if it hurts another country, like that they have to produce a lot of food and they are maybe having a water shortage because of that, or so; this is something I don't want to support. But I don't care so much for the global effects.

Thinking about the future, I have been thinking about it a lot over the past years. Like should I prepare, store food, but it is also hard when you just go by month to month, or day to day, and have to get food for kids and yourself. So, I have nothing prepared, nothing stored away. But I know that my dad and my brother and my ex-husband have, so I think that I rely on them if something would happen. In the future, if I know that I can afford it more, have the time and the resources, I think I would store more food and prepare more for uncertain times.

Quotes

If I could afford it I would buy meat from like a farmer, like a whole box of meat but that's kind of expensive.

If I had more money to like care about that stuff I would. In periods I have bought more like ecological, eco friendly, organic, local food, but I don't have that luxury to choose that right now. So I just have to go with what's the most money for the food.

I know some people say the crumbs of the bread and make something out of it, but I'm not, I rather go buy bread crumbs to myself then make my own. So I kind of waste food I guess.

Keywords

Large family, child, money, routines, affordability, toxins, waste, food prep, meat eating, social media

RL5_SE06, Sweden, “I want the best for my children”

Narrative

My name is Anna, I am 34 years old, and I live in Örebro with my two children, one son and one daughter. I work in the school as a student assistant, a job I very much enjoy. My husband studies to become a dentist, so he lives in Gothenburg during the weeks. We see each other during the weekends. During the weeks, I am responsible for the grocery shopping and cooking, and during the weekends my husband helps me out.

We live in a nice area in the north of Örebro. We have several parks and green areas in the neighbourhood where the children can play. We enjoy living there very much. We also have everything we need close by, including food markets. We have a Willys, Lidl, and Hemköp close to our home, so it's very convenient.

For me, it is important to choose ecological and healthy products if possible. I find it very important to buy healthy foods for my children. I want the best for them, especially now when they grow. I don't want them to eat too much sugar, so I talk to them a lot about this, and they know very well that they are not allowed to drink coca cola or eat candy during the weekdays. They are happy with that; they don't complain too much. I also try to buy high fibre bread and other healthy alternatives. I think a lot about these things, mostly for my children. I don't want them to get diabetes or some other disease.

I have become much more aware about health-related issues since I became a mother. Being a mother, I constantly think about what is best for my children and I try to make good choices for them in my everyday life. I always thought health and good nutrition was important, but with my children I have become much more attentive to what food related choices we make and what we eat.

Since I became a mother, I know so much more about what sugar does to the body and what is good for the body. When you are responsible for children, you have to take good care of them. Being a mother has made me read the information extra carefully. I learn a lot from my husband who has soon completed his dental studies. He is very knowledgeable about health-related issues. I also get a lot of information from a friend who is a coach and who teaches about food and nutrition. For example, he taught me to look for the keyhole symbol in the supermarkets. It is the Swedish Food Agency's symbol

which helps consumers identify healthier options when buying foods. I am grateful for his knowledge.

My friend told me to look for the keyhole symbol when buying products. I should look for this symbol because these products are good for the health.” My awareness about food choices is mainly related to my willingness to sustain a healthy lifestyle for me and my children. But of course, I also think about the environment and what choices I can make to develop more environmentally sustainable behaviours and habits in my food consumption. In my role as a teacher, we always talk about these things. I teach in class 3 and we often discuss issues related to the environment; we watch informative films, and we talk about the importance of sorting trash and so on. As a teacher, I find these things very important.

Right now, in my personal life, I feel that I can make good, healthy, and sustainable choices for me and my family, but with the prices going up all the time, I don't know if I will manage in the future. I am not very concerned about it at this point, since I have a full-time job and my husband has a good education. But I do think about the future and whether I will be able to make good food related choices for my children. I want the best for them, and I want to continue buying ecological and healthy products, but the high prices might make this more difficult for us.

Quotes

Right now, it is manageable, but now the organic food becomes very expensive. For example, organic milk is 10 SEK more expensive. Right now, it's alright, but if the prices keep getting higher, I don't know about the future.

I always explain to my children that they can't drink coca cola since it contains sugar. I explain to them that it is not good for the body. I don't use oil that much either [...] and I try to not use too much salt. I always want to give my children nutritious, healthy food.

Keywords

Health, children's health, responsibility, high prices, knowledge, ecological products, social environment, food labels, partner support

RL5_SE07, Sweden, “I suffer with the whole world”

Narrative



My name is Mona, I have been working as an assistant nurse in a nursing home for the last 20 years. In the past years I have worked with issues related to nutrition and I really like this new role. I live with my husband a few miles away from Örebro. I always walk or take the bike to work, it's only a few kilometres. I'm married and we have three children and six grandchildren. Our oldest son was born in 1985.

Every second week I do grocery shopping at ICA Maxi in the city. I try to do all my errands at the same time, so I don't have to go to the city that often. I like to shop everything at once, but sometimes I go to the farmers market where they sell very nice ecological locally produced greens and vegetables. However, it is a bit far away from our home so nowadays we don't go there too often.

With the petrol prices being so high, we rarely go to the farmers market anymore. I would like to go there more often but it becomes expensive with the high prices.

I don't like processed foods. I prefer to cook myself and to make food from scratch. I think there are too many pre-made options in the stores these days. For example, you find 70 different kinds of carrots or salads in plastic, chopped in various forms and shapes. I don't see for what reason. We waste our resources by producing all these pre-chopped salads, these products require a lot of water and energy to produce, and I can't see the need of it. We should also eat more seasonally based. We cannot take for granted that we have access to everything all the time, everyday day, every season.

"Why can't we buy carrots and salads the way they are and chop them ourselves?" One of my sons and my daughter often buy semi-finished products. They don't think too much about sustainable options, but they have small children so it is understandable. They simply do not have the time. When I was their age, with small children, I also cooked the most simple dishes and bought cheaper, pre-made foods. Nowadays, I never do that anymore. I have become much more aware about the environmental perspective. But of course, now I also have the time to engage more in these issues.

During the weekdays we try to eat vegetarian foods, and in the weekends we sometimes eat something more exclusive, often meat or fish. The decision to eat more vegetarian alternatives is both based on our ambition to consider the environmental aspect, but also to be more proactive in relation to our health. Our youngest son is a big inspiration, he often encourages me to try new things, not least alternative protein source, including legumes and lentils and so on. We often talk about food from a sustainability perspective, and I learn new things from him. I also have a colleague who inspires me with new ideas. She often shares information at work and encourages us to learn more about healthy and ecological alternatives. I appreciate that a lot.

But the price can be a hinder. Not necessarily for me, personally. I'm in an economic situation that allows me to choose sustainable and healthy alternatives. But it really upsets me when there is a price difference of 30 SEK. It's terrible. It hinders socio-economically vulnerable people from buying and cooking healthy, ecological, and nutritious food. It makes me very sad and upset. How should people afford to eat good food? It is impossible.

What really upsets me is how we waste food in society. I never waste food; I would never do that. I make lunch boxes from leftovers or put it in the fridge. I would never throw away food. We need to stop for a while and not take things for granted. From my perspective, we need to change our way of thinking around food production and consumption. I hope that we will start to produce more locally and stop relying so much on

imported products. With climate change, I hope we will find new crops that can survive the new weather conditions that are to follow.

I am very concerned about climate change. It worries me how the climate will change in the future and result in storms and floods and so on. In many countries, the circumstances are already very difficult. How shall we manage? “I suffer with the whole world. [...] I am worried, and I must say I am not very optimistic about the future. We need to talk to children about these things when they are very little in order to settle norms early.”

Quotes

From my perspective, we need to rethink and stop taking things for granted. We cannot continue to demand constant accessibility to all products, every day during the year.

With the petrol prices being so high, we rarely go to the farmers market anymore. I would like to go there more often but it becomes expensive with the high prices.

Keywords

Farmers market, local, petrol prices, responsibility, food waste, seasonal, solidarity, meat eating, social influence, health

RL5_SE08, Sweden, Senior in shared living struggling between health, practicality, and affordability

Narrative

My name is Sverker, and I am a 79-year-old retired man, living in a retirement home in Örebro. Before I retired almost 15 years ago, I used to work as a production manager at a mechanical workshop with several different departments. I have three children, two sons and one daughter. One of my sons lives not too far away from here, and the other one lives in Helsingfors, Finland. My daughter is in Stockholm, so we don't see each other too often in the family. I was married twice, but now I live by myself – although I am never alone since I have people around me all the time in this shared place.

I am diagnosed with malignant cancer which makes life difficult in various ways. The disease severely affects my mobility, so I use an electric scooter to move around in the

area. I always go grocery shopping with a friend here in the house who also suffers from downward mobility. We go together in our electric scooters to the supermarket and we both think it is very nice to do this everyday activity together.

“We do the grocery shopping together, me and her. Even though we are both disabled and tied to our scooters, we want to take care of the shopping ourselves. We want to have it that way.” Often, we also cook together. Sometimes we eat in my apartment or in hers, and sometimes we go to the dining room and eat with the others. When we cook ourselves, our condition affects what we choose to cook and eat during the days. Although we want to choose non-processed products and healthy, nutritious foods, the disease sometimes makes it difficult to find the energy to cook proper food. Such days we buy semi-manufactured foods, for example a soup of some kind or some ready-made dish that you heat in the oven or the microwave. But at least five days a week we try to cook ourselves or we eat in the dining room. When we cook ourselves, we often make fish or meat dishes of some kind. We try to not buy processed meat since none of us enjoys that.

Another aspect that hinders us from choosing healthy and sustainable foods is the price. Ecological, healthy and environmentally friendly foods are often very expensive and, in our situation, we must think very carefully about our expenses.

“Unfortunately, the environmentally friendly foods are usually not the cheapest. As a pensioner, at least for us, we are in the situation where we must consider prices very carefully every day. [...] Since I became a pensioner, I had to lower my requirements on food drastically. Nowadays, I cannot choose something just because it tastes good, I always have to consider the price.” I never waste any food, I am very strict on this point. From my perspective, it is incomprehensible why people would waste eatable food. It makes me very upset. I often see people in the dining room throwing lots of food, often they clear half of their plates! It really upsets me. I want people to understand that we cannot afford to use our resources in that way. There are not infinite resources on this planet, and we must make sure there is enough for everyone. I must say, this makes me worried for the future.

“We can’t continue to behave the way we do, but people seem to ignore this fact. They continue to throw away food. People say, “it’s just this little thing I’m wasting.” But if there are a hundred people who throw away a little, this could be enough food for 10-15 people.” I would really wish for more awareness among people, awareness that we cannot continue in the same way as we do now.

Quotes

We don’t have infinite resources on this globe.

The high price is absolutely the biggest hinder [to eat and consume healthy foods].

Keywords

Price, food waste, disability, sickness, awareness, responsibility, health, collective action, sharing

RL5_SE09, Sweden, Optimising the diet at all levels

Narrative

I am 33-year-old man, I grew up in Australia with my parents and two sisters. Several years ago I moved to Stockholm, and for the past few years I've lived in a self-organising collective with about 50 people. In the co-living, I share a room with a friend, and I work from there remotely in the IT-security business.

I get my food from supermarkets, depending very much on where I can get the cheapest organic red lentils, which is my main food component. Apart from lentils, I eat vegetables or whatever food I find in the house that is leftover from others; this can include meat and other animal products. That is, I am omnivore and eat just whatever others leave and would otherwise get wasted.

An ideal meal for me would be something containing a combination of slow carbohydrates, i.e., legumes, some kinds of cooked and fresh vegetables, and some kind of complete non-animal protein, which altogether tastes good, is visually appealing, easy to make, easy to store, cheap, and organic.

In my everyday life, I take different supplements to ensure that all my minerals, vitamins, and amino acids are covered. Currently I also track my macronutrients and metabolism with an app to get a better grasp of how my body reacts to certain food. After some point at which I started to understand that our bodies run on food as energy, I got interested in better understanding the matter. I like living a life where I have lots of energy and feel good, and I am optimising to live a long live up to the eighties, in a way just like old people I see doing gymnastics and enjoying energised lives. I realised that what I put into my body can help to reach that goal.

I hate food waste and I really get triggered when I see others wasting food. I also go around and scan the house to find food that is at risk to get wasted and make meals out of it. I think it must be related to some kind of trauma, but I cannot tell what this trauma could have been. It might have been an episode here in the house some time ago, where someone in an emotionally difficult moment threw away all food in their packaging, all being perfectly fine to eat still and theoretically separable (in the sense of recycling), but I felt unable to do anything in that moment. So, I get now very much triggered if I see someone wasting food, it also feels like something I need to improve through self-development.

When it comes to the environmental friendliness of what I buy and eat, it is a bit hard to know what the environmental costs of the food I buy are. Hence, I just choose my purchases based on costs and nutrients. It would be nice to have on the packages some concrete information about the carbon emissions of the products. Looking at my social surrounding, I feel that in relation to eco-friendliness all are quite aligned in the sense that they know that eating something like meat might be suboptimal for the environment, but

they anyway do it. But going down at personal level discussions, I observe that it can be a tough topic to discuss, because many people get triggered. If someone has a certain perspective, when starting to discuss e.g. the science around food, new findings, diets, etc. they easily get triggered, it is as if it invalidates their lives when one questions their understanding of food and how they live their lives. So I find it often better not to discuss food related topics. Also, most people nowadays seem to have at least mild eating disorders, so it feels often better not to raise the issues.

I get my information about food and health through listening to health podcasts, and if I hear about certain new concepts I try to find out more about it online through search engines and trying to challenge the concepts or related ideas, in the sense of challenging them and trying to find out also about counterarguments.

Looking back at possible changes in my food practices in the recent past, it has been easy to waste less food since I moved into the collective housing, I can always just find something to complement my meal, rather than having to buy full new portions. In reverse, I can more or less subtly encourage others to not waste food and use up what they would waste. Impediment or barriers to make my food practices more environmentally friendly is lack of information. If there was clear and verifiable information posted about the environmental damages of consuming certain things, i.e., if there was visibility of the costs of consumption, this would be extremely helpful. Looking ahead, my worries are related to the currently rising food prices; I have also started to store some dry foods since certain foods may become unavailable. Generally, I don't assume that food will always be available as it is today.

Quotes

Why don't people put the carbon emissions associated with each food on the actual package; I guess it would be hard to track it from source to supermarket, but that would be super interesting.

Right now I basically don't know the environmental costs of buying certain vegetables or other kind of foods, like how much does like a pack of dry lentils vs. like, I don't know, a litre of yoghurt, what are the environmental impacts of that.

I can guess that to buy things from Sweden can be better for the environment, but at the same time, like, given the economies of scale, like the supply chains we have over the world, maybe it is actually not, I don't know, so that's a challenge.

Even if you know that is probably less true than what you recently read, it is better to just not say it, because people get triggered really easily, it like invalidates their lives in some way.

A Ven-diagram of many circles of needs and in the very small middle circle is where I try to live my life.

Keywords



Food waste, lack of information, price, food labels, packaging. healthy, optimised diet, food stock, trigger, emotions, trauma, sharing, podcasts, science

RL5_SE10, Sweden, “My religion helps me make better choices”

Narrative

My name is Ella, I'm 30 years old and I live in Gothenburg. I live with my husband and our two children, 7 and 2 years old. My husband does not work at the moment, but he has a degree in law. Our family came to Sweden from Syria in 2015, the year of my daughter's birth. Parts of our family are still in Syria.

I work as an assistant nurse in Gothenburg. I like my job; it has taught me a lot about health issues and made me aware of the importance to take care of the body. These days, I care a lot about my body and health, and I want to make sure I stay as healthy as possible. We often do the grocery shopping together, me and my husband. But I do the cooking, since my husband is not very good at it. Our favourite dish is grilled chicken, everyone in the family loves it.

Most times we do our shopping at Lidl in our area, it is located close to our home. We also go to the Arabic stores in our neighbourhood, but I prefer the Swedish markets since you find better products there. In the Arabic stores, you rarely find healthy alternatives, nor ecological or sustainable products.

I care a lot about what my children eat so I try to buy as nutritious and healthy food as possible. I want them to eat as little sugar and fat as possible and I try to make them eat greens and fruits every day. Most greens and vegetables, I try to buy ecological since I know it's better for the environment. I always look for the keyhole symbol when I buy food for the children, I think that is a good guide. I don't let my husband buy cereals or other products without this symbol. Unfortunately, I don't care as much about what me and my husband eat, to be honest; although we also try to eat healthy food. But I am much more concerned with my children's food habits.

The keyhole symbol is very useful for us. I never let my husband buy anything for our children without this symbol. [...]. I'm much more concerned about my children's food habits. I try to eat healthy food myself, but I don't care as much about my own food consumption. [...] But we want to be role models for our children, so we do try to do our best so that our children can imitate our behaviours.” We have changed our food habits drastically since we left Syria. Nowadays, we eat healthier, more nutritious food, and we have made sure to cut back on fat and sugar. In our home country, people don't think so much about healthy food habits. Many family members have had health problems caused by bad food, unhealthy food. It's a very different food culture from what I have experienced in Sweden. When I speak to family and friends in Syria, I try to inspire them

to eat better and to try new foods or recipes. For my family here in Sweden, I'm glad that we have adapted to a new way of eating and living. I'm very happy that my children get to live in a culture where they can enjoy healthy food and hereby enjoy a better lifestyle.

In our home country Syria, people use ghee for everything. It's not very healthy. I used to eat this a lot, but since I moved to Sweden, my food habits has changed drastically. Moving to Sweden has made us more aware of what we eat." To obtain information about what is healthy and not, I use google. I also find inspiration from people on Instagram who share ideas and recipes. Of course, we also share ideas among friends and family. My colleagues are also important in that respect. Sometimes they bring a lunchbox with some food that is completely new to me. This makes me curious and then I sometimes copy their recipes. Coming from another country, we are always facing so many new things.

Even after seven years, there are always new things to learn about the country and its culture." Sometimes I find the food prices too high. Then I need to walk around in the store to find the best price. I consider the price most times when I buy food, I have to; especially now during these difficult times. If there is any sale or drive for some products with reduced prices, I often buy these products.

We almost never throw any food away. According to our religion, we should not waste food. This would be disrespectful towards poor people in need. Islam also says that we should not throw away food for environmental reasons. My religion helps me in many ways to be better in these respects. It motivates be to act more responsible towards people around me, as well as towards nature. It also helps me respect myself. Prophet Mohammad says that we need to take care of our bodies in order to enable a good life. Without good health, we will not be able to live the life we want, nor have the energy to take care of the ones we love.

In society today, I wish that people were more concerned about what they eat and how they take care of themselves. Since I started working as a nurse, I have met so many unwell, sick people who have not taken good care of themselves. This was truly a wakeup call for me to at least try to better myself when it comes to my health and wellbeing. I wish people thought about his more.

Quotes

My religion helps me make better choices, including decisions related to food. It motivates me to appreciate food and to take better care of myself and people around me, but also to respect the nature and our environment.

Since we moved to Sweden, me and my husband live a much healthier life. Nowadays, we think much more about what we eat and how we take care of our bodies.

My colleagues often inspire me to try something new. They often try new, eco-friendly alternatives, and this makes me want to try as well.

Keywords



Health, change of culture, religion, family, children, education, inspiration, social media, social influences, cultural culinary traditions, food waste, prices, food labels

RL5_GR01, Greece, Economic struggles as an inhibiting factor for access to sustainable food

Narrative

I am a 22-year-old woman, I live in Thessaloniki Greece with my family, and I am a student. I enjoy going to the supermarket which I perceive as an enjoyable activity to see what's new and available so I am the one that goes to shop in the supermarket. However I also go to the food market which I believe is more accessible due to their lower prices if I compare it to the supermarket. I also prefer the food market because I support local micro enterprises which is very important. I was very focused on Asian cuisine as they have many vegetables with many different ways, The main obstacles of food is that I am lactose intolerant so I can't eat any milk based food but I get a pill and eat some anyway because I can't completely cut of all milk based products. I also had gastritis due to anxiety and I could not really eat many of the foods available. Another obstacle to access is the economic issue. So some of the basic food like pita gyro (Greek sandwich) is almost 5 euros. So if fast food is so expensive then what will happen with organic food prices that are actually good for you? Which is something that I am worried about. Especially if I want to support a sustainable diet which is good for me, good for the planet and is something I believe in, I won't be able to do it due to the very high prices that inhibit accessibility for me for this type of food. I do engage in sustainable eating in about 30% of my diet but due to the high prices I cannot support a full diet of sustainable food. If these prices continue to rise like this, I am thinking that in five years I won't be able to buy anything organic. My parents didn't want to buy for instance organic rice but I persuaded them to do so since I told them its better for you, so I was buying organic rice, organic fruits, or spaghetti from carrots so I liked to find new ways of accessing new food. Another positive thing was that the women in my family and my brother - my father does not really support changes in eating habits- but my mother and sister were positive in trying new things, for instance spaghetti made out of carrots. The social environment plates a very big role in this because if I was living alone it would be fine I would buy this type of food and eat it alone but now I live with 3 more people so the type of food you buy needs to be accepted by everyone because it is costly and need to be consumed. So it was important that my parents would also contribute economically to buying organic food because if I was alone I would not be able to afford it. Then I was out of a job for a while so I could not live the life that I wanted. So I would go organic 2 weeks per month or 1 but now (with the prices) I

cannot even do one week. Which really affects me because soon I won't be able to do one week of organic food.

Regarding cooking at home I am mainly the one that does the cooking as my mother rarely cooks as she is working, so the days where the family would eat meat I would do the cooking, I would not mind cooking meat but I didn't want to eat it so I would have to cook a side meal, but I could not eat only rice for the rest of the day so I had to come up with something with more vitamins so I would buy something organic like tofu or Tempe that I would get and I would eat it myself. I tried to persuade my family to eat some of that food but my mother and sister did go into the process of trying to eat more organic food. We also do not throw food but we use tapers to place food from previous days in. A while back we would throw it away and I told my family we should not. Near our neighbourhood we have some homeless people so I thought of giving some of the leftovers to them but regardless you cannot throw food away because we cook for a family so we end up with large quantities of food. When I was living alone for a while with a roommate we only had organic food and vegetables in the fridge so it was a great time regarding access to sustainable food. I opened the fridge and I had everything I wanted. It was a time where both me and my roommate had jobs so we could afford organic food and it was during the lockdown so instead of spending money to go out we would spend it on food.

In order to find access while I walk I look around to find restaurants that serve vegan or organic food and also I look at Instagram to find relevant places where I can eat. Today this is how you search for information through social media so in many ways is the best and worse thing that can happen to get information. What also helped with access is that when I started eating organic it was around the time when organic food shops were opening in Greece so that was really helpful. However many times I am jealous of the previous generations that did not have these chemicals in their foods. For instance my grandmother slices a tomato and she smells it and then she gives this to me to smell and you could actually smell the tomato. But I feel lucky that I have access to organic food now because a while ago you could not find this type of food in Greece.

So there is access however the biggest issue with that is the money since they are expensive. When I go to the supermarket I am very focused on what to get. I know what products I will buy that will be organic. Or when I get out I will say to myself today's expense will be to eat an organic salad. So it's about organising your expenses and knowing what to get.

Quotes

If I want to support a sustainable diet which is good for me, good for the planet and is something I believe in, I won't be able to do it due to the very high prices that inhibit accessibility for me for this type of food.

So there is access however the biggest issue with that is the money since they are expensive. When I go to the supermarket I am very focused on what to get.

Keywords



Lack of access, money issues, family, acceptance

RL5_GR02, Greece, Living conditions as a challenge to accessing sustainable food

Narrative

I am a 25-year-old woman, a vegan, a student and I live in the student dorms and sometimes in my home with my family. I go to the supermarket and to the farmer market to obtain food but mainly in the student dining hall. I mostly eat what's available in the student dining hall unfortunately, where we have no idea where food comes from and there are limited options regarding vegan food. So when they have meat with a side of rice or spaghetti I choose the side and then combine it with a salad. They have different options during times like Easter so they offer more non meat options for those who are fasting (due to religious reasons) but in general there aren't many options. When I am at home in Thessaloniki I don't face many challenges in accessing food that I want. However when I am in the student dorms I face many challenges with access. For instance, it is forbidden to have electric devices like a small oven in the dorms for safety reasons, for instance accidents with fire so I can't really cook, so my main option is the food in the kitchen dining hall. So there are very limited options in sustainable food and also since I avoid meat I mainly eat carbohydrates and I worry I will gain a lot of weight. However nowadays you can find sustainable food in supermarkets much more easily than before for instance soy products that can be used as a substitute for meat although these products take much more time to cook as you have to boil them first and then cook it again so it's way too time consuming. I have become more conscious about how I select food. Although organic food is more expensive. You know, when you are a student you tend to select the cheapest products so I am struggling with the prices of organic food. However you have options these days for instance you can get almond milk instead of cow milk or you can get organic eggs instead of non organic but that has to do with how my budget is at a given time. For instance, I like avocados but I can't afford to eat them every day or sometimes it is also a matter of time, since I can't always have the time to cook the way I want to. Also the kitchen in the dorms does not really inspire me to cook and also the economic reasons are important as I can't go out and buy new food every day so eating cereals for instance every night is more durable as they also last long. Social media and tv could help with information about sustainable food and access although I am not certain how realistic this is for Greece as a country to make people interested in sustainable food. For instance in places like the student dining hall you would expect a way to provide more information in sustainable food and they don't, but then again this does not has to do with those who work there as they cook whatever they are given.

Regarding food waste when I am at home with my family if something is left over we keep it for two days in the fridge.

Quotes

I mostly eat what's available in the student dining hall unfortunately, where we have no idea where food comes from and there are limited options regarding vegan food.

In places like the student dining hall you would expect a way to provide more information in sustainable food and they don't, but then again this does not have to do with those who work there as they cook whatever they are given.

Keywords

Student, limited student dining hall options, student, expensive prices

RL5_GR03, Greece, Sustainable eating as part of someone's identity

Narrative

I am a 23-year-old woman. I am from Corinth and I live in Thessaloniki, I just finished my Veterinary school. For about two years now I have been a vegetarian, so I don't eat meat, that is, I eat anything except meat. I also eat fish and this actually started with me because I had researched a little more about the effect the meat industry had on the environment and morally. So from then on I took it gradually and limited those foods, but I also tried to find ways to eat better and in terms of the environment. I will definitely say that the department I was studying also played a role because I had encountered a more animal friendly mentality.

Another influence that made me eat in a more sustainable way exposure to information from documentaries regarding the state of the environment and the immediate need for all of us to change our eating habits and protect the environment as we are running out of time and environmental resources. We are not doing well as humanity and we don't have much time remaining we have regarding the destruction of the environment is imminent as our resources are finite and they are running out. I had been involved a bit more and so then I realised what was really going on in the industry and what effects it has on the environment. And all of this kind of combined and I also had influences from

friends and such and that definitely helped. My friends also played a role as I saw, in practice What it is like not to eat meat, because other students had also stop eating it. That is, my two friends from school did not eat meat so I saw that ok it's not that hard after all it's not a terrible thing not to eat meat and so little by little I started gradually and then as time went by I limited it more until I stopped. So I was also influenced from my friends. It is also a contribution to feeling better about yourself in that you are trying to do something about it. But it is also the moral part in terms of animals, that is, those that come out of meat industries. I don't agree at all. So I can't support eating meat. It also makes me feel like part of a community as it gives me a certain identity. However there are many obstacles regarding access to sustainable food. For instance We were together at a panhellenic veterinary conference and during the break he had a lunch break. you would expect it to have many options for many people who eat sustainably and it was almost all meat so it had meat pizzas, sausage, pies. I don't know, it was all meat and only had a very small selection for someone who doesn't eat meat. And if you think that it is a big panhellenic conference in the veterinary field you would expect options regarding food. And we are in 2022 and in Greece so you see that they don't really think about people who eat sustainably. Which is something of importance regarding access to sustainable food. Another obstacle was from my dad who's more traditional and doesn't really understand the concept of sustainable eating. And the same was from my grandfather, and grandmother. My mother and sister were definitely more accepting. But this also causes issues with access because they would be cooking chicken for instance and they would ask me whether I would like to eat a portion. So they keep asking me even though I haven't eaten meat in 2 years. One the other hand some factors that helped me with access to food are social media and YouTube as you can get information through that. For instance you can now see more chefs offering vegan recipes so now you see a recipe for pastitsio (Greek dish traditionally using minced meat as an ingredient), that does not include meat so now you have an extra choice. Also access to sustainable food is becoming better in super markets. A few years back only one super market would carry vegan chicken fingers and now you see almost every supermarket carrying that. So no I have access to vegan alternatives that I can replace meat with and I don't even miss the taste of meat. Regarding food waste we try to keep food as much as we can but we throw away left overs if they are left for a long time. I would be open to deal with food waste in a different manner but I don't have any information regarding how to deal with that.

Quotes

We were together at a panhellenic veterinary conference and during the break he had a lunch break. you would expect it to have many options for many people and it was almost all meat so it had meat pizzas, sausage, pies. I don't know, it was all meat and only had a very small selection for someone who doesn't eat meat. And you don't expect that when you go to a panhellenic conference. And we are in 2022 and in Greece. You see they don't think about these people (who are vegetarians) either. It's something important.

Keywords



RL5_GR04, GREECE, Exposure to animal meat farms as the starting point for change

Narrative

I am a 22-year-old medicine student and I live in Thessaloniki, Greece. I became a vegan 2 years ago. The main thing that motivated me to look up things about this, was a friend of mine who is studying veterinary medicine and when she talked to me about how she started going to the chicken farms and in all of these structures of the production animal products, I understood the breeding conditions of animals, so I was kind of shocked because I wasn't aware of it at all. Firstly, about the way they are raised and secondly how harmful these products can be in some cases, so I got emotional about how an animal is tortured. And I was also thinking about the part of what I'm eating if I continue to eat meat and if it's healthy for me. Regarding access to vegan and sustainable food first of all I am in a favourable position because the only thing I don't eat is meat. So the only thing I had to replace was the meat part with mostly soy products. I mostly had to restore macronutrients and micronutrients like iron and protein which I obviously have wide access to like everyone else. Now regarding, let's say these meat substitutes like soy burgers, soy mince, etc., they exist in common supermarkets, so, you don't need to go to a vegan store and find them. I personally have never been to a vegan store. That is, I shop at the very common supermarkets as before. The downside is that there isn't any variety, meaning it's a bit of a monopoly at the moment. It's a company that makes vegan soy, whole wheat schnitzel and burgers. One that basically makes burgers, there are two that I know of in the big supermarkets. It's one that makes vegan minced meat as far as I know, so the production is very small, there's no variety, so if you don't like that kind of thing you can't find anything else, unless you look for something fancy in a shop that honestly at the moment I don't even know if it exists and where it is in Thessaloniki. Now as for going out, away from home, eating in taverns, fast food and such, what I have to say is that there are definitely huge differences when it comes to Thessaloniki, Athens and Greece and Europe abroad, in the accessibility of such products with European cities having a much wider selection of products. In Thessaloniki, there are shops that sell exclusively vegan and vegetarian products, so I haven't seen any crazy difficulty in accessing such food either, because my knowledge of where to look is rather limited, but then again it's limited because I haven't and have never had the need to say that I want something more. I want to put something new in my diet etc. In the beginning when I first started in the first months I didn't even know that these products exist. So I didn't know what to eat and I was eating spaghetti and pizza, but after searching and so on, my

friends told me that, you know, this is also available in this way in a supermarket, and its better to combine it with vitamin C, to put lemon with a tomato for better absorption on nutrients. So yes, I learned this knowledge along the way. Also now if a meal is to be cooked at home by my mom, which will include meat, the meat will be in a different dish from the side dish. That is, if she's going to cook steaks with potatoes, she'll cook steaks in the oven and she will cook potatoes again in the oven in another pan that aren't together like that, but what I've noticed, which probably only happens in my own family, is that somehow they have stopped eating and they have reduced their meat consumption quite a lot and this is probably because I stopped too. The main information I get about food and accessibility apart from my friends is from the internet. For instance let's say an internet page, which makes purely vegetarian recipes and describes a complete meal from all sides and not just a tasty meal which can be fattening. So yes, that was definitely a source and then YouTube channels from abroad Greece. In terms of finding what suits me nutritionally, in recipes, etc. it was mainly on the internet, let's say blogs, like Madame Ginger's or on YouTube recipes from foreigners who have a channel that is very specific. Regarding ways forward to inform people I think doctors could certainly open a discussion and nutritionists, possibly a discussion with their patients regarding the nutritional part which unfortunately at the moment is not happening at all. I mean, I don't know if there are specialised nutritionists who deal with this kind of sustainable diet, but let's say for doctors, I know from my little experience that no one does, and I've even seen very negative attitudes from doctors.

For example in the hospital I remember a girl who had iron deficiency anaemia and the reason was not eating meat. The physicians were very negative. They told her to start eating meat and to not do stupid things like that. I mean, I've had and still have conversations with people who are very fanatical against vegetarianism, no matter what you say to them.

Anyway, you know, it's not worth going into the process of convincing someone. I also had this happen with my dermatologist because I was taking pills for acne and I had mentioned it to her just to let her know and she told me not to do this kind of nutrition and that her husband had started it and he was feeling very weak in his legs so I think that as trivial as it sounds it would play a big role to have health professionals be more informed and supporting. Health professionals should obviously first raise awareness through conferences and what can be done, so that they can then raise awareness among patients as well. Now regarding food leftovers it is thrown away. I'm not doing anything about that. A few months ago I tried to keep vegetable or mushroom leftovers in the freezer to make broth later. But this didn't suit me at all. I mean, I did it a couple of times, but it didn't suit me at all. So at this stage, the food will either be consumed or if there is something left and spoils or is not eaten and it seems like days have passed, it is thrown away.

Quotes

In the hospital I remember a girl who had iron deficiency anaemia and the reason was not eating meat. The physicians were very negative. They told her to start eating meat and to not do stupid things like that

Keywords

Physicians, vegan diets knowledge, sustainable diets, health expert community

RL5_GR05, GREECE, Motherhood as a starting point for initiating sustainability in food and searching for access

Narrative

I am a 46-year-old mother of two living in Thessaloniki Greece. “The starting point for eating more sustainably was when I had my first child. Until then I didn’t care or biological food or ingredients. I would go to the supermarket and buy products that now I would not even look at.

So 14 years ago it started when my son started eating solid food. We then started looking and buying at organic shops and we saw that the prices were very high. We solved access to organic food though when we realised that there are organic markets and thus we started buying our food from there only”.

So we buy everything related to food from organic markets and the super market is used only for other products like paper, cleaning products etc. So collectively as a family we created an economic plan because 14 years ago processes were different between organic and non organic products so we said that eating organic is worth the time and money since the farmer’s market was not always close to us. “However we tried to go to the farmer’s market due to the fact that there you can access products that are from the region or at least from Greece as the organic section in the supermarket has products from all over the world. So it’s different when you go to the farmers’ market and you see products that are local or regional because you also have the contact with the producer you know where their farm is, you might have visited the farm, it’s a different thing as you trust them”.

Regarding issues with access “It’s not too difficult, it’s once a week, a morning trip to a walk with the husband, carrying products. Yes, the difficulty is that you have to go to the farm market on a Saturday morning, it obliges you to go on a Saturday morning, because although I know that there are two farm markets during the week, who will go on a Wednesday and Thursday morning to do this shopping?”. “Another issue with bulk shopping is concerning the greens and salads where you can buy a lot and then something will not be maintained properly, so you throw it away, that’s the bad part. Because it’s fresh, it’s not packed with preservatives that will last. If you don’t cook it to eat it right away, you’re wasting it”. “So with the leftovers we had started a composting system on the balcony, but since we didn’t have easy access to a place to dump them, we

had to make an extra trip to a village. And in the summer it was a bit of a bad situation with the smells so we abandoned it. So the leftovers are thrown away”. The information regarding access we usually get from the internet, we also have my sister, who is very involved in seed conservation and very involved in that part of sustainability and organic food so we have access to a lot of information. Other opportunities have also presented themselves. Now, in addition to organic, let’s say, there are also initiatives that bring you home a basket with everything there is regarding organic food. I think people would be helped in initiating a more sustainable diet by going on trial, and see if it makes a big difference financially. Because I believe that it is not such a tragic difference, especially now that everything in prices has increased. The prices can be even better in the organic food markets especially for dairy, cheese and such, than in the supermarket. Yes, and then if you try it, you can see the difference in the mood, as well as when you know that what you consume first of all supports a local producer and does not go to a multinational company, doesn’t that make you feel better? And gradually I think you will see a change in your body as well, that is, when all that sugar and all that preservative that you consume through packaged and standardised foods are gone. So theoretically you can say I don’t go because it’s expensive, I don’t go because it’s far, but you’ll go somewhere else to drink a coffee even if it’s far. It’s not that time consuming it will take just an hour to go get the food

Quotes

The starting point for eating more sustainably was when I had my first child. Until then I didn’t care or biological food or ingredients.

Keywords

Motherhood, trial of sustainable diet, financial gain

RL5_GR06, Greece, Change in accessing sustainable food through knowledge regarding global warming and toxins in meat

Narrative

I am a 37-year-old man living in the centre of Thessaloniki and I am a vegan. “I am a person who used to eat a lot of meat. Mostly chicken, not really other types of meat.

What created the change was two things. First I learned about the production of meat and that animals are raised with the aim of feeding people and that has effects on the environment such as the release of gas after the death of animals and global warming. The second had to do with health issues. Like toxins from animal products that have adverse effects on health and I perceive becoming vegan as a step in bettering myself. So I heard people who had stopped eating meat and that thought stayed with me. So I stopped smoking and after some time I stopped meat.

“We live in a culture that where eating meat is part of our habits and our beliefs. role. We had learned to eat meat through our families and perceptions that not eating meat weakens you”. So I think culture and family players an important role. There are some people that claim that if they don’t eat meat even for a single day it weakens them.

What sustained the change was the realisation that I could live without meat and take my protein from other types of food for instance combining lentils with rice and cottage cheese”. I started by going to a dietician and told her to create a diet that is balanced in fat, protein etc but that should be vegan. She did and I saw that I did not have any issue with sustaining it. “I also talked about my decision with my parents and told them I will become a vegan so if you disagree I want to know now so we don’t have any issues with meat and food being thrown away. So we agreed and we did not have any issue. However they still eat meat.” Regarding food access I buy products from the super market and the grocery store. I cook everything myself in large quantities and then I split the food in portions and I freeze the portions. This helps me organise and also reduce food waste as everything is weighted and calculated as portions so I know exactly what each portion entails”. Regarding stopping consumption of junk food and gaining access to sustainable food I think that this has to do with a deeper need of each person. It has to do with the need for personal development whether that is exercising, eating clean, respecting animals. If someone has such needs they will find ways to access sustainable food and sustain it. If not they can find thousands of excuses not to do so. In Thessaloniki which is the second largest city in Greece we have access to endless options of food. You can eat sustainable and you cannot. I also believe that access to sustainable food can be cheap as well, you can eat a salad that costs arounds 2-2.5 euros instead of eating a gyro (Greek fast food with meat) that costs 3 euros. So if you want you can access sustainable food that is cheap and that goes back to what I was saying about deEper needs to do something and sustain it. It’s important to have the values to say if I do my part in doing what’s good and everyone thinks that way then change will be achieved.

Quotes

What sustained the change was the realisation that I could live without meat and take my protein from other types of food for instance combining lentils with rice and cottage cheese.

Keywords

Sustainable food, access, doable, effort, personal drive

RL5_GR07, Greece, Living in a small village and family not supporting vegetarianism food as restricting to access sustainable food

Narrative

I am a 25-year-old woman, I study food technology and I live in a small village outside Thessaloniki with my parents.

I started not eating meat when I was exposed to information through my lecturers regarding health issues with consuming meat. Then I also went online and read studies and watched documentaries and realised how important it is for the planet for people to stop eating fish and meat.

Also for health reasons I saw a study with athletes and those who would eat meat their blood was blurry, those who feed on animals had blurry blood. And the athlete who did not eat meat had spotless blood.

And of course we get too many toxins from animals. So all these reasons but I have to say that I am not a vegetarian now. What happened is "I went back to my parents and it's hard to stay vegetarian, because they didn't understand it and they don't understand it now and we can't cook 15 different meals. That is, there was a time when my mom tried it a little, e.g. she made me instead of a pasticchio, she made half a pasticchio with minced meat and half with mushrooms for me to eat too, but that wasn't done on a daily basis, so it kind of didn't go on". "Although I want to become a vegetarian again, I still want to try it again, because I really did see differences in my health and I basically felt like I rested more easily. And when I had blood tests done, even though I thought, because I always had a problem with iron too, I thought it would be very low since I didn't eat meat, but instead it was higher than before. I still try to reduce eating meat.

During the week we will definitely have two times meat. Well, but I avoid it in general, if we have potatoes with chicken again, I'll just eat the potatoes. Because my body can't stand it very much, I'll say it's the second day until I can't eat, I can't stand it very much. "Another issue with access is that I live in a small village. So, it's definitely more difficult, that is, it doesn't have a big supermarket where you where you can find what you need. Anything, even a vegan sauce, anything you won't find here because there are only grocery stores and butchers and such, so some food is not accessible. Salads and such, we have our own garden, so that sort of balances it out." Although in Greece this culture of offering variability of vegan food. Because my friends too, because they were vegan, when we went out we had a very hard time finding something to eat, even in a tavern, we just got fries and mushrooms for example. There was no variety. Even in Thessaloniki, which is a city. There are many difficulties with access for instance

when I was staying in Thessaloniki I remember one day the only thing I consumed was water because I lived with my brother and there were only meat and cranberries in the fridge, but because I was trying to do this thing, not eat meat, I was just stuck with water. Regarding food waste we have chickens in our garden in the village, so everything goes to them. However, when I lived in Thessaloniki, for example, and I had food left over, I threw it in the bin.

Keywords

Information, University, Garden, Vegan, support, cooking

RL5_GR08, Greece, Family and social context as a hindering factor for sustainable diet

Narrative

I am a 23-year-old woman, I live with my family in Thessaloniki and I study civil engineering. “5 years ago I decided to make a change to my nutrition but I didn't do it right away because I was living with my family which was an extremely limiting factor”. “However when I realised that because of my studies that I won't be able to leave the house and move somewhere on my own to support and eat alone and prepare my own meals, after a year of mature thinking, and after I reached a mental limit, not being able to continue to eat the way my family eats, I decided that I would change my eating habits while living in the house with my family”. So about four and a half years ago I stopped eating meat . At first it was a bit gradual, but the final change was final and communicated clearly to my family. So it wasn't something hidden. I cut out dairy at the same time as meat, so I was a vegetarian-pescatarian for about three and a half years. And a year and a half ago I made a complete transition to veganism. The transition from a meat-eater to a vegetarian was, I think, more difficult for me, for my family, for my surroundings, compared to going from vegetarianism to veganism. So I think this is the biggest and most important step for anyone thinking about doing the change.

“I haven't changed much from where I get my food, but I spend a lot more time looking and researching what food to get from more supermarkets, which I used to not care about, I just used to go to my nearest supermarket or wherever was convenient and I got the products I wanted because I could find them everywhere. whereas now I spend more time looking for the supermarket that has maybe the one product I want at that moment, which is not there, not available in all supermarkets. Also a big change has been

the fact that I now shop a lot more from street markets and grocery stores, which I didn't do as much in the past, as I didn't eat as much fruit and vegetables, but I also didn't care as much about where they came from, that is, I didn't mind if my fruit was from the supermarket or from some smaller producer on the street".

Regarding food waste "I never throw away food straight away as soon as it's left over, as a human being I hate throwing away food and it makes me very sad. Also when let's say some food, before I cook it, it gets to the point of spoiling, it's something that because my mother is responsible for cooking, providing food in the house, it's something that I draw her attention to, often, that she doesn't buy much more than what she thinks we need". because I always cook a portion or two for myself, so I will very rarely throw away a portion of food. However many times, especially in the summer because of the temperature, products such as fruits and vegetables spoil, so only when I can't consume them, obviously I will through them away. My family will definitely throw away a portion of food about once a week. Regarding challenges "the biggest factor that prevented me from changing my eating habits, is the lack of awareness of my surroundings. The lack of education on this part. I acquired knowledge along the way, that is, I first made the change and slowly studied and read about this part and acquired knowledge that my people did not have and it was quite difficult for me to convey it to them, because when they heard it from me they did not they believed as easily as when you sit down to read a scientific article that proves to you that a vegan can get all their nutrients. So this was the most hindering factor. Also older people, like grandmothers, aunts, who have grown up with very, very specific nutritional standards and carry a Greek mentality, that food is a sign of love. So it was very difficult to convince them why you don't want to eat the food they offer you.

"When I started my change in eating, the supermarket products were very few, e.g. I specifically remember that in Masoutis (Greek supermarket chain), I think if I'm not mistaken, the milk substitutes that existed were clearly for people with a lactose intolerance, because they wrote on the bottles that they were lactose-intolerant and so on, that is, there were no plant-based drinks that are now widely available". So the fact that now there are a lot of options is very helpful. Also, I've always been interested in learning about vegetarianism and various nutritional information about vegetarianism and meat-eating, as opposed to or not, whenever I was constantly learning and constantly reading, it became easier and easier for me so that was also a factor that helped and was and the biggest factor, which prompted me to switch from vegetarian to vegan. It was a book by a young doctor, called 'how not to die and how not to diet', which explains in a completely scientific way how an exclusively vegetarian diet can prevent and also cure diseases. And actually 1/3 of the book is scientific references. In terms of access, I can also mention that in restaurants outside, in fast food and so on, the options are very few and very specific and there is no understanding from the workers or the cooks what a vegan wants to eat. As well as in many events in which there is some catering, some provision of food or when they say for example in events and so on there will be lunch, I am almost sure that even if there is something vegan it will not be enough calorically and energetically to cover me. "Finally there aren't many doctors who are positive regarding sustainable eating and to help vegans, whether it's your gynaecologist whose advice you want to follow in a certain pregnancy, whether it's your pathologist, or whoever. They are very few. And it is usually a significant deterrent for many people, that their doctor does not support such a decision".

Quotes

Five years ago, I decided to make a change to my nutrition but I didn't do it right away because I was living with my family which was an extremely limiting factor.

Keywords

Family, nutrition, physicians, sustainable eating

RL5_GR09, GREECE, Family influence as an enabler of change

Narrative

I am a single mother of two girls, I live in Thessaloniki and I myself grew up in a family of stock farmers. "We ate meat in our family but my father has the ideology of feeding the animals with food that he would farm from his fields himself. So everything followed a very nice cycle . Everything was organic, no chemicals would be used and even in vegetables he would try to find ways not to use any chemicals to protect the production, for instance he would use a garlic concoction he would make to protect the plants. So everything we would eat was organic and seasonal and we produced it ourselves as a family. This became a habit later on with my family as well. " Later one of my daughters saw a documentary about animal farms and decided that she would only eat meat produced by my father because she knew that her grandfather produced meat in a very specific way. "Then she also decided to stop eating meat in general when in a trip to Belgrade she encountered a movement against killing animals for meat so she became a vegan. However what I want to say is that this change happened gradually she stopped eating meat, then fish then dairy. This had an effect on all of us as my other daughter also stopped eating meat and I choose small farms to buy cheese and eggs and when I eat a specific kind of meat and it will be from a specific farm." So I believe that you must choose where you buy your food to make sure you buy organic from small farms. "For instance I got fruits from our farm in the village, this time of year there are apples and pears they don't have any chemicals. Same with the eggs we get from my mother. However, getting other organic food can be expensive, for instance peanut butter or almond milk are very expensive so we try to have a budget for that to sustain it. And we also organise the nutritional value of what we get, for instance we eat avocado or I make my own bread once per week and it lasts a week and I make sure I make it with organic ingredients. We

also cook burgers out of cauliflower and quinoa that are organic”. “I have to say that this is very difficult though not many shops support that. They don’t have variability.

If you go to a pastry shop to buy something you will see that everything has cheese for instance or that the products are not organic”. “Regarding food waste I try not to waste anything. I will give you an example. I made zucchini soup recently and it ended up having more liquid. So instead of throwing it away, I froze it to use it in a risotto”. So not wasting food is also part of how you prepare it. I don’t want to throw away food because it is also very expensive. For instance the peanut butter I buy costs 19 euro which is very expensive. I can’t afford to throw that away. In general you also need to have a good budget and organise your food around that.” I would love to go to a shop that has as specific type of date that is very healthy and tasty but I can’t afford that. So I will go to another shop that have a type of date that I can afford. Or I won’t eat dates this month I will eat them next month”. “ I get my information online, I also order online where you can find food with good prices, for instance maccha. I also ask the organic shops that I buy food from, when they bring a new product I ask to find out what that is. For instance the black lentils that I didn’t know exists, I learned from the people in the organic shop I go to buy food from and I also learned about the red lentil which is richer in iron and protein which we need since we don’t really eat meat almost at all”.

Quotes

It’s good to have more respect for people who eat sustainably as we don’t do it to be trendy as lately veganism is considered a trend, which is something that does not represent us.

We do not see it as a trend but a choice and sensitivity towards sustainable issues. Both my daughters say they don’t want labels because of my nutrition. I just engage in this type of nutrition due to my beliefs.

Keywords

Family farm, daughter, organic, cooking

RL5_GR10, Greece, Sustainable eating and access as a luxury due to prices and limited amount of produce

Narrative

I am a 40-year-old woman, a mother of two and I live in Thessaloniki, working in a real estate company. “Until 2017 I had absolutely no contact with sustainable eating or eating in a healthy manner.

From the moment I gave birth and my kids started eating solid food I started searching what I should give them to eat and started avoiding foods that weren't seasonal. So, a start was that I would give them seasonal fruits as well as salads. In 2019 after the birth of my second child I developed an autoimmune disease called lupus”. After a lot of searching with physicians and blood analyses I ended up meeting a physician who is still monitoring my health who told me that one of the main reasons that people develop autoimmune diseases is stress and bad nutrition. So, after searching I also found out that nutrition plays key role. “So, I am taking medication that supresses the lupus but I also needed to take care of my nutrition to further help my defences. So, I need to eat as much as I can organic, seasonal, to avoid meat and of course no sugar and salt”. ” I am the one who decides what to eat, what to buy and what to cook in the family so I decide the plan in the week and I go on Monday to buy the food’ so I try to organise this around our needs. Another reason that I came in contact with sustainable food and access to it was that my husband had a field in a village outside the city in which there are fruit trees, olive trees and we created a vegetable garden as well and starting to work with that I saw how important it is to eat what nature provides according to each season. “So, we try to eat from what the garden provides from May to October regarding fruits and vegetables. However, this is very difficult to sustain for 12 months. I will give you an example. In the garden we have planted many tomatoes. So, we used them in salads, in different recipes and the ones that were left I thought to make them into a sauce for the winter, so I don't buy sauce from the supermarkets that have preservatives and bad ingredients. So, I made a big amount of tomatoes to create sauce that took a lot of effort as you need to boil them etc so I tried to make as much as I can from the tomatoes and I was feeling really proud that I went through this process. The sauce didn't even last till November. The amount of food is not enough to feed 4 people. The production ends in August so the food produced just isn't enough”. I don't want to buy from the grocer because I don't trust them that the food that they sell as organic is actually organic.

Some of the obstacles regarding access is the prices of food, that this year especially have reached a new level of expensive. Especially organic food, but even so maybe I would buy more if I knew that it is actually organic but I don't know if a trust the groceries. “For instance there was a grocery that sells both organic and non organic near me and I remember a lady buying organic apples and she did not remember from where she took the apples (from the organic section or not) and wanted to return them and the person working there said that I will put them back and he was just randomly allocating the apples in the organic section and half in the non organic section. It was completely random”.

But even in the certified shops for instance I saw some organic blueberries and there were like six blueberries in a package for four euros. What am I going to do with six blueberries exactly? Decorate a cake? “Regarding food waste we have dogs in the field in the village so we use left overs to feed them so we don't throw anything. We also compost, so we place some left overs for fertilisers like rotten fruits and veggies. So we don't throw away anything”.

Also there aren't many ways to access organic food in restaurants as I don't know any that serves organic food. Even if they did they would be so expensive that they would be unreachable. Anything that is organic is expensive so its like a luxury to eat consistently organic. " In general its difficult to sustain that. For instance we have olive trees and make our own olive oil that is organic but in order to produce that- and I am talking about a production that lasts only for the needs of the family - it takes a huge effort. We go every weekend and we collect the olives, press them etc its a whole process and it take a lot of time and effort. As this isn't our job not only it takes a huge effort but also the production is so limited if you go organic. If you wanted to make this fully sustainable and eat only from your own production then you would need to quit your job and this would be a full time job, that is you would need to become a farmer". "I don't know how this could be the only way people eat as you would need to negate all other non organic products on the market and its not in the economic interests of the producers to do that as if they quit using chemicals then their production would be reduced to a fraction. The amount of produce you loose when you don't put any chemicals is drastic". However something that could be done is inform people about organic food maybe through national campaigns about the benefits of organic food, where it comes from the benefits of eating sustainable for the environment because this kind of information is not available in Greece and many people are not aware about any of that.

Quotes

Until 2017 I had absolutely no contact with sustainable eating or eating in a health manner.

From the moment I gave birth and my kids starting eating solid food I started searching what I should give them to eat and started avoiding foods that weren't seasonal. So a start was that I would give them seasonal fruits as well as salads. In 2019 after the birth of my second child I developed an autoimmune disease called lupus.

After a lot of searching with physicians and blood analyses I ended up meeting a physician who is still monitoring my health who told me that one of the main reasons that people develop autoimmune diseases is stress and bad nutrition. So after searching I also found out that nutrition plays key role.

Keywords

Health issues, motherhood, garden, autoimmune disease, family, prices, distrust

RL5_PT01, Portugal, A 59-year-old woman, living alone, struggling to survive with help from neighbours.

Narrative

I am a 59-year-old woman. I live alone and I do not have children. I'm from the north of Beira Alta, district of Guarda. My parents were very poor and moved to Lisbon to work. I stayed in my homeland with my maternal grandmother. I only came to Lisbon when I was 6 years old. At that time, we lived in a neighbourhood of shacks, next to the Sporting stadium. We moved to this neighbourhood in 1974. The houses were occupied by people living in shacks. I have a sister and two brothers. One of my brothers has passed away. We all went to school until the fourth grade. I was unlucky in life because I didn't have a happy marriage. I broke up with my husband and later I entered a new relationship. I wasn't happy either because my partner was alcoholic and didn't want to work. I worked as a cleaner in commercial and office buildings, from 4 a.m. to 9 a.m. We lived on one-income (only my salary).

I couldn't take this situation anymore and he left. Now I'm alone. I can't work because I have a chronic liver disease. I was hospitalised for two months. I suffered a lot. I was right at death's door. I live with difficulties because I only have a small allowance from Social Security. It's 143 euros and 23 cents. I also do laundry for a neighbour who is elderly and sick. She pays me 60 euros a month. Some neighbours also help me. Sometimes they give me food because my money is not enough to pay the rent for the house, medicines, food, water and electricity. This month I can't buy the medicines because I don't have money. I go shopping on the Continente (hypermarket chain) and I cook my own food. When I have money, I buy rice, pasta, salt, sugar, potatoes, onions, Icedtea (zero sugar), milk, bread, butter and meat (pork and chicken). I avoid eating fats and I also reduced salt intake because the doctor said it's bad for me. People say that white meat is less harmful, but I don't like it. I prefer pork and, if I had money, I would like to eat lamb, a good "feijoada" (Portuguese traditional dish. Its base is beans, pork and vegetables) ... Yesterday I ate fish that a neighbour gave me and, when I can, I also buy a little bit of fish. I also like fruit and vegetables, but everything is very expensive. Today I ate bread with a little bit of cheese that a neighbour gave me and I cooked some food to eat today and also tomorrow. Sometimes, I don't have dinner. I only have a cup of milk and eat a biscuit. I eat according to what I can buy or what my neighbours give me. I think the government should give a subsidy and help those in need. To have a healthy diet, you should have a fish meal, a meat meal, vegetables and fruit, but everything is very expensive. There should be subsidies for farmers because they are very affected by drought and fires. Animals also die because there is no food. If farmers don't have aids, they can't produce and then there's no food on the market to buy and prices are increasingly expensive. Organic products are much tastier and healthier because they don't have fertilisers or chemicals, but they are inaccessible because of the price. My house is very cold in winter and very hot in summer. This year in the summer I almost

couldn't sleep because of the heat. The municipality carried out some maintenance and repair work on the building where I live. They said it would get better because they put Styrofoam in the walls, but everything stayed the same.

Quotes

I have good neighbours, thank God.

Yes, we would eat healthier if we had money.

I don't throw anything away because, in the life we're in, nothing can be wasted.

The State, or the party, should help those most in need.

They made the urban gardens, to fight with each other.

Keywords

Poverty, high prices, illness, neighbours, gender, healthy food, illiteracy, farmers.

RL5_PT02, Portugal, Frustrated 59-year-old man, involved in social and institutional mistrust and in inconsistent practices of production and consumption

Narrative

I am a 59-year-old man, born in Braga, widowed for 4 years. My parents brought me to Lisbon when I was 3 months old, and my father took care of a farm here. While my father worked, my brothers and I “went to school barefoot” and helped the family: “we had to dig the earth, as we produced food to eat, like chickens, potatoes, but I liked that (...) and I never got hungry.” At the age of 14, I left school and started working (in 1978 or 1979), in construction work, also to help out, and “my mother used to get up at 4 am” to “take care of the garden” of a private big homestead (about “100 meters wide by some 300 meters long”). At 18, I was already married, and my wife was 17 and pregnant; but “my daughter died two days after she was born”. Then “I went to the troop” and my wife “went to Caritas

to ask for some help”; at that time “she already had thrombophlebitis (...) and she had to go to work”. After troop “I went to work for the Town Hall (...) as a gardener’s assistant” and then progressed to become a carpenter and, later, a joiner. But in the meantime, “highly qualified” people entered the service and “they progressed faster, with less years, and I at 41 earned less than them”, being “people in charge who didn’t understand anything about that”. In addition, there was no longer a 100% paid retirement after 36 years of service, regardless of age. I’m still at the service but on sick leave due to a hand injury, but things are getting worse. I had “another job” at the same time, out of necessity, in gardening matters, but “the Town Hall couldn’t know that” because I wouldn’t get the necessary authorisation, and that’s why I got home very late and tired for years. When we moved to this neighbourhood life improved, and at that time “there was more policing” and people “were more united” and better behaved than they are today; due to neglect of neighbours, even my house has already been “set on fire twice”. My wife “died young, she was 54 years old” and today I have seven daughters: “the youngest is going to be 25 now, the oldest is 41”. All can read and write; “I taught them, I educated them, they are people who (...) know how to educate their children, as I educated them, as my father educated me, and (...) nowadays you don’t see that” – dominates a total lack of education and awareness. My daughters are all married except one, who lives with me, because “her husband recently left her, with 2 children, and he has already hooked up with another woman, with 2 children too”. But my son-in-law usually comes to my home for lunch, as do my other daughters and grandchildren, from time to time. “I make the food myself” and “even when my wife was alive (...) at night I made the food”. Nowadays, “my daughter cooks” the food at night. “And even today they ask me to make ‘cow hand’, ‘cabidela’ [little blood of chicken with rice], feijoadas [bean stews], everything (...), and even my daughter’s colleagues ask me that”. In addition to meat or fish, “I like to eat vegetables, broccoli, mushrooms, which I used to find in the fields”, as well as other plants that before “I picked a lot” (...). I really like chard, and others that make a salad” or others used “when I make Alentejo bread soup or (...) stew”. On the contrary, “people here don’t value anything! For them that is no good”, preferring to produce and consume things with fertiliser and pesticides. They are people who “have no conscience” and the problem is that others who cultivate in the garden are also harmed, due to the action of the wind. “This should stop! Or else there should be more inspection in the community gardens, because here it happens from time to time”, with “machines they have” to measure the contaminants in the soil. I also produce in the garden, but “I give more than what I eat (...) to anyone who asks me”. “I don’t like to sell, because the person selling doesn’t appreciate what is doing”, and I’ve already proposed to the Parish Council that they organise a space for the disposal of surplus from the gardens “for those who wanted to go there and get it”, free of charge. Unsuccessfully. I have already given seeds to the local Charity for mentally disabled people, which also has a vegetable garden here; and the Charity supported people also cultivate. In addition to what I produce in the garden, “I usually go shopping” especially at the supermarket: “I usually buy fruit” but I also buy meat at the butcher. For me, healthy eating is how I do it. For example, As “I don’t really like tomatoes in salads”, I cut them into pieces and eat them with “a little bit of salt” and also “a little bit of ham, or (...) cheese, (...) as a snack”, as well as “bread, sometimes some broccoli, or cauliflower (...), tomato, a small boiled potato, but without anything”. “My daughters love everything” and “here my daughter also likes” the same type of food. I “advise everyone” to healthy food. In my case, I prefer natural products and “I avoid oils;

it's more olive oil (...) which my daughter gives me", from a faraway farm. And I avoid certain things; on medical advice I reduce the consumption of milk, yogurt, cheese. And I like better "everything that is organic", preferring "to give one more euro or euro and a half in what is organic than to be giving 50 cents for fertilisers and rubbish". "My father, my mother and me, we already knew" these things, but "we weren't as aware as we are now", in my case thanks to "courses I took (...) at the Lisbon City Hall". But if we continue with the usual style, things don't get better. When these gardens were made, some courses were also provided, but they were not mandatory. But the City Hall itself did wrong before that, by having removed "good soil" and having put "land with stones" in the same place. And although rules have been defined for the good use of the gardens, people "don't comply" and "I'm tired of warning them!". Even the urban arrangement is poorly done: garden benches away from the shade of the trees, and these are too "close to the road". I have also said this to people in the City Hall and they ask me to influence people so that they do not leave garbage in the public space; but I have replied that I cannot do this further: "here they are against me (...)". In addition to garbage, "there is a lot of waste there", after the time when people "went to the waste containers" of supermarkets – with expired food, which could not be sold – and "brought home pallets and pallets of food". Now "there are many people who go to the institutions and who don't need to" and who "spoil too much". Let's say 50% of people "don't look to the future". To resolve this, "if education is not given at home, the school will not do anything either (...). They treat the teachers badly, they treat everything badly, they break everything" and if there are complaints to the parents, they "go to the school and beat up the teachers (...). And this is getting worse". To change this, only if it were possible to take people "to some organisation to give them a new mind (...), because they don't have a mind". That is why "there has to be policing, there has to be inspection, there have to be fines" and compliance with the rules. People must be forced to comply with them, under penalty of doing "community work" or "cleaning woodlands" or "cleaning land". But that's not what is done!

Quotes

We went to school barefoot; (...) we had to dig the earth, as we produced food to eat.

I prefer to go shopping and say 'I paid an extra euro, but it's better than eating fertiliser!

I obtained this type of information mainly from the Lisbon City Hall, in the courses I took.

There has to be policing, there has to be inspection, there have to be fines.

Keywords

Path dependence, child labour background, conflicting values, traditional conservative mindset, limited ecological production and consumption, social and institutional mistrust, discrimination and intolerance, frustrated expectations

RL5_PT03, Portugal, Elderly woman with a life path of poverty, gender inequalities, but also resilience

Narrative

I am a 73-year-old woman who was born in a small and rural municipality far from Lisbon. I am an only daughter and got married there when I was 18. When I was 20 years old, my husband came to Lisbon and I came shortly after, but I left my three children with my parents until we organised the house. But while in my homeland “there were only serious, well-behaved women, not here (...) and after 27 years” my husband “decided he wanted another one”, and his wife today is one who “was put out on the street beaten by the father”. Thus, at the age of 45, “I was left to work alone”, with the rent to pay and with three children: one aged 9 and the others aged 8 and 6, although the older ones were “more raised with my mother”. I was “fighting for my life, always looking for the cheapest” and letting my children eat first what they wanted from meals, while I was arranging things; only at the end did I eat whatever there was. When I came to Lisbon, I first stayed “in Póvoa de Santo Adrião, where there were those very big floods”, so “later the Red Cross gave my parents a house (...) in Odivelas”. But then “the 25th of April came” [Portuguese revolution for democracy, in 1974], my children were born – in 1974, 1975 and 1977 – and “we started to put ourselves inside the houses by stealth”, even before the prefabricated houses of temporary construction that they had built and where I lived, and before this one, built near 1991 to 1995. My children have all left home, but in the meantime, in 2021, I welcomed into the house the one who already has a daughter, because he became unemployed; that’s how he, his wife and daughter are with me, but we divide the tasks and keep the expenses separate. And even food, but everyone eats from the garden when it suits them. With his wife, on some days we get along well and on others not so much. Here in the neighbourhood “nobody has helped me with anything”, but we help each other when necessary: “even last Sunday, we all helped each other; (...) there was a guy here, on the ground floor, who (...) set a fire at home (...); we all did what we could”. And “here a few years ago (...) a neighbour of mine (...) set some tires on fire” and then I “went upstairs to help with the cleaning”. I have a “very small retirement pension”, which was €375 and now is around €400, to “pay rent for the house, food, drink” and “even medication”, because “I was a cook for twenty something years” but I had to “stop because of the pandemic”. It was a “very heavy work” but I am “used to work all my life, with heavy jobs”. And this is the case of work in “my garden”. I’ve got this one for a year and a half, “but we already had other old ones”, which “were destroyed”. But the City Council and the Parish Council saw the importance of this and helped us, and that’s how this project was built, which “we pay almost €80/year”. “I would have died already if I didn’t have the vegetable garden”, which provides “a supplement to food (...). It’s not enough for

us to support ourselves”, because “the land is little (...) but it gives (...) green beans, onions, tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, cucumbers, courgettes”, and we use everything. As the fruits “are very expensive”, in addition to being of poor quality, I make up for it with things from the garden. “I, who was passionate about bananas and, I still am, and about oranges, had to put them aside”, but “I have had tomatoes in the garden, galore; I just don’t eat tomatoes for breakfast: lunch and dinner, it’s always tomatoes”. And nothing is wasted: “I’ve already made tomato jam, I’ve made tomato sauce, I’ve made that tomato with the stir-fry, chopped tomatoes (...) and frozen there (...); nothing is wasted (...); even the very branch of the tomato, I break it all into small pieces (...)”. And with the onions too: I peel them and keep them in the freezer in separate bags: some with chopped onion, others with the sprouted parts of the onion, others with slices, others with onions in quarters, and, when “I want to make soup, I go to pick them there”. And what I don’t keep in the fridge or eat, “I cut everything into pieces” and “bury everything”, because I don’t like composting. I prefer to keep putting the branches of tomatoes, of sweet potatoes, leftover cabbage, potato skins, “whatever it is, everything goes in there” in the furrows in the earth I dig. And I also put there “the coffee grounds” that they get for me, and “which replaces the fertiliser, as I don’t put any fertiliser at all”. And “the only chemicals I use is venom for snails”; and now I also fight the ants, using “coarse salt” in their little holes; “no chemicals!”. But I also buy food: “one chicken is enough for me for several meals”, or I make “boiled hake, with a potato” or “a grilled bream, or “a few legs of octopus”, all boiled or grilled; in fact, “I don’t even have cooking oil at home”. Before, “I ate much better (...), and many things I stopped eating now”. It was those things that I sometimes bought: yogurt, pizza, “those lasagnes that come in little boxes”. But I still buy what I need around here: I only buy anything from the Chinese. Life is increasingly difficult, but “there are many people who, even so, waste a lot of food”. I remember so much the sacrifices “that my mother made”, behind my father’s back, keeping part of the oil, rice, etc. for me during the week and “then on Monday she used to come with all of it loaded, for me to eat”. But “today children don’t look at the sacrifices their parents make”, and when I see it on TV it causes me “such a revolt (...)”. And the weather is getting worse: there are no more seasons and even that day when that red dust [from the Sahara desert] came, it ‘burned’ everything in the garden: the tomatoes that had already been sown had to be replanted. And what they say we can try to do to make things better, I don’t know. Perhaps “to walk more on foot, for example” and to “go to work” it should be “getting the neighbours together (...)”, instead of each one going in their own car. And take “shorter trips” and “go by bicycle, for example”.

Quotes

I was “fighting for my life, always looking for the cheapest.

Eat, boys; mom is going to eat soon, you go first because mom is here to arrange this things, and only then mom is going to eat.

We started to occupy the houses furtively.

I would have died already if I didn’t have the vegetable garden.

Keywords

Path dependence, poverty, semi-formal economy, circular domestic economy, gender inequality, parsimony and savings culture, precarious income, preventing food waste

RL5_PT04, Portugal, Salomé's Struggle to Provide Healthy food to her family and cares about the future of her daughters

Narrative

I am a 33-year-old married mother of two girls, from Lisbon, Portugal. I worked as salesperson in a clothing store at the Colombo Shopping centre in Lisbon. I grew up in a slum neighbourhood. "I was born when my parents were 19 years old. I've always lived here, not here, there in Alcântara...".

I spent most of my time with my grandparents, with my grandmother, because my parents worked... however, my mother stopped working because she had my brother and I started to spend more time with them. We lived in a neighbourhood with no sanitary conditions... we didn't have piped water for the house". "I remember perfectly well when we used to haul water on jerry cans". We had nowhere to shower...". I have completed secondary school (12 years of study) and start working.

Now I live with my husband and my two daughters in an apartment that belongs to a cooperative. The neighbourhood was completely isolated without access to public transports. Only in 2021 did the neighbourhood have a bus service every half hour. Regarding my daily food routine, "I do the shopping, because I pay more attention to promotions during the week and I'm more focused on that. The father (interviewee's husband) doesn't have that idea about promotions, what is cheaper and what is not". I have to pay attention to the prices, because at this stage of the championship that we are in, everything we can save is better. I'm the one who prepares the food".

I do my shopping at Continente or Pingo Doce (large supermarkets), because I always try to check where there are more promotions and where we can manage things better. "I have to travel by car, because I go on shopping once a week. I don't bring a bag or two. I bring a lot of bags and then it makes it impossible for me to take public transports, because I go alone. As I have two daughters, the father stays with the girls and I go alone. It makes it impossible for me to go by public transport. I also drive to work. There could be more sustainable means of transport, or cars, in this case there are electric cars", but I can't afford to have an electric car.

Regarding public transports, "maybe instead of having so many public transports, we should have the subway. I think it's faster and maybe not so polluting".

We have our meals, almost always, at home. Once or twice a month we go to the McDonald's or we have a pizza because my daughters ask me to go. "I'm the one who prepares the food". "My food is a little bit different from my family.

I prefer a dry diet...I eat rice, tuna, pasta and I drink three liters of water a day. I try to make their food based on vegetables, meat, fish, and pasta".

"I always try to make the exact amount of food, so we don't waste it".

"We eat a lot of fruit, a lot of vegetables, but we don't have an urban vegetable garden, unfortunately".

Sometimes, my neighbours that hold an urban vegetable garden give me a lettuce or a cabbage. I care about healthy eating. I decided to have a dry diet because when my first daughter was born I gained weight. So, in order to lose weight, I decided, to have a dry diet. It was my decision. It was not a doctor's recommendation.

I don't use butter to fry. We don't eat fried foods.

Almost everything is grilled. We don't eat a lot of stews. Our food does not have much sauce. I am concerned with the future of my daughters. That is why I try to tell them that we have to ration water and not to waste food to protect the environment. Otherwise, the impacts of climate change will be more and extreme and the droughts will harm the crops that we need to feed ourselves. My husband does not have this kind of concerns. I think that this is due to the education he received at home. Despite the fact that we grew up in the same neighbourhood, as I used to say, "each house is a house, every family is a family", and not all people have the same opinions and not all of us share the same values". In my case, these values were passed on from what I experienced and my mother and my father taught me.

I think that nowadays, many people don't have this kind of worries because they don't have time to think about the future. We live in a constant rush between home and work. We don't have time for ourselves. It is very difficult to waste time on these things that people think are of little concern, but which in the end is what will manage our future from now on, because we are dependent on all of this. This is also related with each one's education level and with what people learned in school. Education is the key factor, both at home and at school. I think people should be more aware of environmental changes. The TV channels could give us more information. Social media could also play an important role to raise awareness of the environmental challenges and risks we are facing, because many people, nowadays, use social media: twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.

"There could be other types of information and other more specific things for people to be fully aware that this is serious...it is very serious...it is not a 5 minutes television talk, or a newspaper article, saying that there is a drought, the dams are empty ... , this and that, and then nobody hears about anything else....

I think that nowadays what is important for people is football ... and it is politics from time to time, when people are not pleased".

I think that the politicians talk a lot and don't do anything. To promote an effective behavioural change, there is a need to have a sustainable economy that enables families to have access to more sustainable transports, more organic food, to be able to save energy, to somehow manage on some way... I will give you an example. Now, on the TV they are saying that this year we will not have Christmas lights, to save energy. It shouldn't be just this year because the more energy we save, the more water we save, things can perhaps be a little better"."instead a being so serious in 5 years, they could

be in 50 or 60 years, because what is at stake is the future of our children, because we die and they are the ones who stay here and if we don't pass these values on to them, it will get worse and worse... the world will end faster". I am more concerned about the environmental change because I have two children and I am worried about their future. Therefore, I try to be informed about environmental issues and healthy food.

When I have time, I always try to listen to the news and watch the debates on the TV about environmental issues. Regarding food, I think that a lot of diseases are related with the kind of food we eat. Eating well, eating good things helps us to be healthier. The problem is that we do not have the resources to buy what we want. The food prices are too high. Therefore, when we go to the supermarket, we have to make choices. We have to choose between buying organic products or to buy the cheapest ones.

We always end up choosing the cheapest. ... We used to eat more fish than we do now because the price of fish has risen so much My mother also keeps saving. She doesn't buy so much food at the supermarket. She goes more to a street market (Feira do Relógio). She buys the food to a man who buys the products directly from the producer. It ends up being cheaper and helps the producer.

Quotes

I do the shopping, because I pay more attention to promotions during the week and I'm more focused on that. The father (interviewee's husband) doesn't have that idea about promotions, what is cheaper than what is not.

My food is a little bit different from my family. I prefer a dry diet...I eat rice, tuna, pasta and I drink three liters of water a day. I try to make their food based on vegetables, meat, fish, and pasta.

I always try to make the exact amount of food, so we don't waste it.

I have to travel by car, because I go on shopping once a week. I don't bring a bag or two. I bring a lot of bags and then it makes it impossible for me to take public transports, because I go alone.

Keywords

Healthy food; Food Waste; Dietary inequalities; Education; Gender roles; local production. Affordability.



RL5_PT05, Portugal, Poor widow, with a past of violence, a small retirement pension, contrasting diets at home but no food waste

Narrative

I am a 63-year-old woman. I am a widow and I retired 3 years ago, but as the retirement pension amount is very small, I continue to clean a pharmacy. I was born in Mirandela municipality. I moved to Lisbon when I was 9 years old. At that time, my sister was already living in Lisbon.

She put me to work, as an internal domestic worker. I cried for my parents. I wanted to go back to my homeland. My sister used to say to me: “you can’t go because António (sister’s husband) is going overseas, and our parents are very poor”. Therefore, I had to stay. She got pregnant. Today my nephew is 53 years old. One day my boss slapped me because I did not know how to wash the floor. I started to cry and wanted to leave. I told my sister that the boss had beaten me, but she said that I had to stay there because she could not afford to take me to her house. I had to stay there until she saw that the boss’s sons were beating me and treating me very badly. Therefore, my sister took me out and I went to work at another house. The new family treated me very well, like if I were a daughter. The employers had no children. Later, I moved again.

I went to Alcântara to take care of two elderly people. When I was 16 years old, I met my husband, and we were together until he died. I have a 45-year-old daughter and a 41-year-old son. They studied up to the 12th grade. They did not want to study anymore. They are my best friends. When I got married, here there was a shantytown. My little house was down there. It was made of brick. My husband, my father-in-law and my brother-in-law built it. At the age of seventeen years old, became pregnant with my daughter. We were very poor. Sometimes I wanted to feed my daughter and I did not have anything. My husband was very lazy. One day he hit me. I left home with my daughter and went to my sister-in-law’s house (his sister). We stayed there for 15 days. My husband was looking for me and asked me to go back home. I told him I would go back home if he behaved better. He straightened up, he started working and I went back home.

It was not until he was twenty that he began to settle down and work. After he was a good father and a good husband. I worked in a nursing home. I provided home care for elderly people. I worked there for 40 years until I retired.

When was created the housing cooperative that built this neighbourhood, I suggested to my husband to become members of the cooperative in order to have our own house. He agreed and we became associate members. I paid an initial instalment of five thousand three hundred escudos, spread over eighteen months (5% of the price of the house). The neighbourhood is very peaceful, very quiet and I have good relations with my neighbours. Some are elderly, they are very isolated, and I go there to talk to them and help them. I buy them medicines and other things they need because here in the neighbourhood there is nothing. My son lives with me. He is divorced and has a 19-year-old daughter. My granddaughter lives with her mother but comes here every 15 days. I go

shopping and cook for myself and my granddaughter. My husband sometimes also used to cook and went on shopping whenever I asked him to go. My son cooks for him because he “is all about diets”. He goes to the gym and cares about healthy eating. He follows the instructions they give him at the gym. He eats a lot of chicken breast, makes a lot of banana smoothies, eats black beans, broccoli, salmon, tuna (not with oil; it’s tuna with water). My food is different: I eat fried horse mackerel with tomato rice (when my neighbours give me tomatoes, they grow in their gardens). Like many vegetables. For me, healthy eating is eating vegetables and boiled or grilled fish. My granddaughter eats very little. I cook what she likes, such as: hamburger, steak, fries... Sometimes I do my shopping at the Pingo Doce supermarket. Other times I go to the Chinese store because the prices are cheaper. I am very concerned about the future. Not for me, but for my granddaughter. It is this generation that will suffer the most in the future from the effects of environmental change. Food is increasingly expensive. Therefore, instead of eating healthier food we have to eat what is cheaper. We eat less fish and more potatoes, pasta and rice.

“There is no money that resists!”.

I also used to eat more fruit and vegetables. Now everything is very expensive. “This year I didn’t even eat cherries”. I don’t waste any food. If I have leftovers, I freeze them all. I even freeze the bread. I don’t throw anything away because when I was young, I wanted to eat and I didn’t have it”. However, in the old days, the food was healthier. It was all fresh. The taste was different. It was all organic. Now what you buy in the supermarket comes from afar. What is produced here in the gardens is also much better. The organic products that are sold in the supermarket are very expensive. We don’t have the money to buy them. Poor people does not have access to these things. That is why I think urban vegetable gardens are a good idea. Local production should be encouraged, and abandoned farmland cultivated. Those who have land and cannot or do not want to cultivate it should give it to other people who want to cultivate it.

Quotes

Healthy food is eating a lot of vegetables, boiled or grilled fish ... that’s what it is for me.

Now I don’t throw anything away, but do you know why? Because when I was a child, I wanted to eat and I didn’t have it.

The worst thing is these young people now, who are coming... they will suffer a lot... with food, with everything.

Keywords

Poverty, healthy food, urban gardens, worries about the future, local production, abandoned farmland

RL5_PT06, Portugal, Man with troubled life path (lack of family stability and poverty) and some drug consumption, but trying a healthy lifestyle

Narrative

I am 53 years old. I was born in the Serafina neighbourhood (Lisbon) and I currently live in Lisbon, Portugal. I live alone. I studied until the 3rd grade, I never married and I have no children. In some moments of my life, I had a few partners, but these relationships lasted a short time. At the moment, I am on sick leave for health reasons, but I am a decorative coatings fitter. Throughout my life, I have had several professions. I started working at the very young age of 13 as a servant. Later, when I was still in my teens, I had the support of Santa Casa da Misericordia to take a locksmith's course. Thanks to the support of this institution, I managed to get a job in this area and I worked there for X years. Throughout my life I have had other professions. My mother died when I was only a few months old due to problems with alcohol. I am her youngest child. "I lost my mother when I was only a few months old, all my brothers were older, they were the only ones who knew my mother and I was the only one who didn't, of all of them I was the only one who didn't know my mother and so, when my mother died I was just a few months old, my eyes weren't even open at the time. My mother was a person, oh, let's not say an alcoholic, she liked to drink alcohol." My father also had some problems with drinking. "(...) my father, when he was in his right mind, with his head clear, he was a gem of a person, a respectful person, a friend to his children. Now, when he had one glass too many, oh the things I said to him (...)". Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I lived in different houses with my relatives, as my father and stepmother did not have enough space in their house for me to live. "Since I was a kid, since my mother died, I've been bouncing around, but I've always been bouncing around well, in every house I have been in with my family and the people who loved me and who gave me love (...)"]". As we were several siblings, I ended up having to go and live with some of my aunts and grandparents. Until I was 5 years old, a lady was taking care of me and then my father asked Social Security for my custody, as he managed to get a slightly bigger house. Although I started living with my father, from the ages of 5 to 6 I stayed in a boarding school and came home only for a few weekends. After about 6 months, I went to live at my aunt and uncle's house in Benfica and I stayed there for two years "[...] they were also parents to me, a mother and a father to me. Every time I see her... Some time ago I was at her house doing some errands that she asked me to do. Every time I go there and see that house...]". After this, I lived with one of my sisters, but it was only for a short time. Then I went to live with my other uncles. They took very good care of me and always with great kindness. I have nothing bad to say

about them. Later, because my grandmother was alone, I went to live with her. I have always been a kid who was willing to go. I never said no because they gave me love and I was respected. I stayed there for another year or two and then my father decided to take me in again. I had to leave the school and I went back to the school in other parish. I was always under the care of my maternal family. At that time, when I was about 8 years old, they wanted me to stay in an institution, Casa Pia, but I refused to sleep there. I was there until I was 13, but I would go home for the night. It was at this age that I finished the 3rd grade, because for some years I failed that school year. My father still wanted me to finish primary school, but I did not want to do that anymore and I wanted to start working as the opportunity to work as a construction worker came up. When I was about 17 years old, my aunt told me to go see the social worker because she knew that there were some courses at the Santa Casa da Misericórdia in Lisbon that could be good for my professional life. My aunt wanted me to have a better future. So, I did the locksmith course in a company dedicated to that work in partnership with the Santa Casa. I worked here for about a year or maybe a year and a half. After that job, I worked in a tobacco company. When I turned 19 I went to the Quimigal factory, which ended up closing later. Then, When I was almost 20 years old, I decided to emigrate to Luxembourg. The idea to leave came from my cousins who were already working there, but I only stayed there for 3 months because I could not find a job. Three months later, I came back to Portugal and started working in an animal feed factory, but after a year that factory also closed. I had other, shorter-term jobs, and when I was 25 years old, I started working as a fitter of decorative coatings. This has been my profession to this day, always in the same company. I am planning to retire because my health does not allow me to continue, but it has been difficult for them to accept my retirement. For me, a balanced and correct diet should contain meat, fish and soup. “There are those kids who say ‘I don’t like soup’. That’s a lie, everyone likes soup, as long as it is well made and tasty. Soup is half sustenance for a body, because if it contains greens, turnip, carrots or other vegetables, it’s half sustenance for a body to be sustained.” Since I was a child, I saw my stepmother choosing the freshest vegetables, meat and fish and that made me know the quality of each product. “(...) I lived in a poor house, but I have a rich mouth, regarding everything, mainly about nutrition.” My father always had vegetable gardens and other family members of mine had them too. I have always been interested in seeing how vegetables grow and I see the difference between the products that we grow and those that we buy. When I go to the supermarket to shop, and I normally drive there, I already know which the best lettuce to buy is, for example. My last companion sometimes did not like it when I chose some products that were a bit more expensive but had better quality. When I know I am getting good products for my food, I do not mind paying a bit more. When it comes to food, I always try to buy what I know is best for me and what is within my reach. I do not like to buy the cheapest because the products have no quality. I think you have to take into consideration the quality of what you are eating. For me, it is very important. And we have different standards now. In the past, people used to eat better than they do now. Fruit, for example, has lost quality, “because it is all food that comes from the earth, but it is all mass-produced, and anything that’s mass-produced, always loses quality!” “(...) sometimes I get sad, because people, there are many people who have many good fields, have many good crops, and sometimes the family does not take advantage of it. If they did, it would be enough to support the whole family and it would still be enough to send out the family, it would still be enough to distribute...” I think people lack a certain sensitivity towards these issues,

and above all, a lack of knowledge. When I was at school, I had study trips to agronomy schools and we saw how to raise a chicken, a duck, how to plant a cabbage or a tree “(...) and that is a life experience for a human being that walks on this Earth, that this Earth that we walk on every day, it’s our Portugal, it’s a charm, it’s a delight, it is living in this environment, breathing this, for me it is all health!” We could cultivate our products much more without having to buy things from other countries. In the old days everything was organic. Now, if you want to have something organic you have to grow it or buy it more expensive from the supermarket. Then, there is another problem. Even people who grow crops need to have more knowledge about the right times to plant. Many people do not let their food grow well, or they pick it before its time, or they plant it at the wrong time. Here, in this agroforestry initiative, in which any volunteer can come and grow their own food and share it, I have planted several fruits and vegetables that I use for my own food. I also distribute food to several people who live here in the neighbourhood and need it. I give away tomatoes, leeks, coriander, parsley... The problem is that not all people think this way and there is a lot of greed. People have gardens elsewhere and they do not share what they have. They would rather have their food go to waste. Some people have gardens and are paying a fee for them and here I do not pay anything and I manage to have food for myself and to give to others. “Nowadays, people are greedy, they are cynical, they are... I don’t know what to call it! We cannot be like that in life because this is a fleeting moment for everyone! To avoid wasting food, for instance, look at this. (...) I have three boxes of loquats here, I got these three boxes from this shop. I asked the shopkeeper, I filled three boxes and on top of these, I filled another bucket I had at home with loquats and I shared them with everyone.” I do not like to waste anything because I was brought up like that in all the houses I grew up in. Nowadays, the food we eat goes to waste and that cannot be. The mentality of people needs to change and it is not only about this. For instance, pollution. Not only in Portugal, but all over the world, the sea is very polluted with bottles, fishing nets... And this has everything to do with the conscience of the human being. When I had picnics with my family in Monsanto, “(...) we cleaned up the place where we were and that is how we should do it. I go to the beach, I finish smoking, I’m not going to put a cigarette butt on the sand because then, when the tide comes in, the cigarette butt that I have put on the sand, the sea will get that butt and then it’s not only that one, it is twenty or thirty, because I am not the only one who smokes, it is fifty people, it is a hundred people, it is a thousand (...).” For me, people should think differently, they should have another kind of reasoning. We cannot live with the bad actions of others. Everything starts with our mentality. “(...) I have been on drugs many times. But when I got high, I went to a place to get high. I would not look for a place to take drugs where a child was passing by, or where a woman passed by who had nothing to do with it, who is the mother of a child, do you understand? Ok, it is my drug, I went to buy my own drug, it is my drug, now I am going to smoke it without hurting anyone, smoke my drug in peace, without a child passing by and saying: ‘What is that man doing?’ I also like to drink sometimes, but if I go out to drink, I will not leave an empty bottle in the street. We have to value our planet more and people do not do that. Another example is the rain. Rain is very important for us to have water to live. It was people who contributed to the fact that we are now experiencing a drought. In the old days, when I used to go to Monsanto, I used to find many streams and brooks and I loved to drink water from there. It tasted so good. It was cooler, lighter. You can feel the difference right away. Clear water. Not like the water we drink at home that tastes like bleach and other chemicals. Now,

almost all of it has dried up. Only one place or another has it. It is not the same anymore and that is a shame... The generations that came after me know less and less about the environment. They only want to know about games and technologies. If I ask a young person or a child '(...) how do you call this plant?' or 'this tree' or 'what does this tree give?', they will say: 'I, I have never seen anything like that on my mobile phone'. That is why I think this initiative is so important, because it brings young people here to have contact with nature and to know a little more about agriculture. This is a joy for me because "(...) it is from here, from this little oxygen, that our box lives, that we breathe, the ozone that we breathe that comes from the air, comes from all of this here, from all of these plants that we breathe." As for my meals, I like to have a good breakfast to give me energy. So, in order to avoid spoiling the extra fruit I have, I like to make smoothies in the morning with oranges, pears and apples. For lunchtime, I also like to eat well. I always eat fish or meat. Then, at snack time, I eat fruit or biscuits and tea. During the night, I eat less. I eat little or nothing. Maybe a tea and some biscuits and I am fine until the next day. I am from a time when there was no junk food. I do not eat pizzas or hamburgers or that kind of food. People say I never put on weight, but that is good because at least when I want to walk or climb some steps, I will not get tired. I am not interested in having stored fat in my body. I want a healthy body mass. That is why when I eat a steak, I do not eat the fatty parts. When I eat fish, I choose the least fatty fish. Of course, there are some typical Portuguese dishes that taste good to me and that I love to eat, but because they are heavier and I know they are bad for me, I do not eat them every day. I have to pay attention to that. There has to be some balance. I'm the one who makes my own meals and takes care of my nutrition.

Quotes

I lost my mother when I was only a few months old, all my brothers were older, they were the only ones who knew my mother and I was the only one who didn't, of all of them I was the only one who didn't know my mother and so, when my mother died I was just a few months old, my eyes weren't even open at the time. My mother was a person, oh, let's not say an alcoholic, she liked to drink alcohol.

Since I was a kid, since my mother died, I've been bouncing around, but I've always been bouncing around well, in every house I have been in with my family and the people who loved me and who gave me love (...)]

(...)because it is all food that comes from the earth, but it is all mass-produced, and anything that's mass-produced, always loses quality!

(...) sometimes I get sad, because people, there are many people who have many good fields, have many good crops, and sometimes the family does not take advantage of it. If they did, it would be enough to support the whole family and it would still be enough to send out the family, it would still be enough to distribute...

(...) and that is a life experience for a human being that walks on this Earth, that this Earth that we walk on every day, it's our Portugal, it's a charm, it's a delight, it is living in this environment, breathing this, for me it is all health!

Keywords

Alcohol, drugs, difficult childhood, loneliness

RL5_PT07, Portugal, Immigrant woman from Nepal, living with tight budgetary constraints but with great ecological concerns

Narrative

My name is Susana and I am 37 years old. I am married and I have a daughter who is 7 years old. I was born in Nepal and I came to live in Portugal with my husband six years ago. We live in Lisbon. We got married in Nepal and our daughter was born there. The main reason I left my country was because of my marriage. My husband and I belong to different castes and our marriage was not accepted by the community. "For me, the big difficulty in Nepal is marriage, because of caste. If my husband belongs to a high caste and I belong to a low caste, it is fine. But since my caste was higher than my husband's, therefore my daughter would also have a lower caste. (...) My family knows about our marriage, but they do not talk and cannot tell the community." There are many things in my religion that I don't agree with. I had a Christian friend here in Portugal and I got to know her religion better and I liked it a lot. Sometimes I go to church. Although my family knows about my marriage, we cannot live in peace and assume our marriage in front of our community. "We got married in Nepal but only my family was present. It was a secret to the community. For that reason, we decided to build our family here in Portugal. The reason we chose Portugal was mainly because it was easy to get a visa and because we already had a friend here. There are also many Nepalese living here and that helps us because we have some support. Our perception and what other Nepalese tell us is that Portugal, among the various European countries, is more accessible in this sense. Despite this, the Portuguese language has been an obstacle because it was very difficult at the beginning. We did not know how to speak Portuguese and when we went to deal with important matters, it was very difficult. "For instance, when I went to the health centre with my daughter who was sick, no one spoke English. It was very difficult when we needed treatment. Also, when we went to buy things, it was very difficult because we could not communicate and ask for what we needed. If I want to buy meat for my

daughter, we could not express what kind of meat we needed.” My husband and I lived in the rural areas of Nepal. We both went to study at the university in Kathmandu. I studied pharmacy and I practiced my profession in Nepal. My husband was a police inspector in Nepal, but he was a civil engineer. Our lives were stable and we did not have any major difficulties. “We were neither poor nor rich. We had a normal life.” We were still there when the 2015 earthquake happened, but fortunately our families were not affected and we were all fine. In Portugal, my situation is different because I cannot exercise my profession here, despite the fact that I have had my certificate validated. One of the biggest obstacles is the Portuguese language. Although I am much better in Portuguese now, it is still an obstacle to being able to practice my profession. “When I arrived in Portugal, it was very complicated because of the Portuguese language, but little by little we learnt more over time. It is still not very good, but it is easier for me to communicate. Simple communication. I understand better than I speak”. On the other hand, all the jobs I find in my area have the requirement of having conducted an internship in Portugal or having some professional experience here. This also becomes a problem. I have also thought about studying here in Portugal, but it is very difficult for me because of the Portuguese language. I would love to be able to go back to my profession, but for now, I know I have to do other things. Here in Portugal, I have already worked as a maid in some houses doing cleaning and then I was in a day-care centre. Currently, I have been working for the last four years as an assistant in an institution, giving information and support to the immigrant community about documentation. My husband is undertaking his PhD at the University of Aveiro. Next year, we are going to try to apply for Portuguese nationality for our daughter, but we would like to go to another European country in the future. Maybe Germany or England. We are considering this because there are more opportunities in these countries. On the other hand, we are worried about moving our daughter to another country because she is already speaking Portuguese here and feels integrated. Our house is small because rents in Lisbon are very high and we earn between 700 to 800 euros each. It is very complicated. We cannot always buy the food we like the most, especially for our daughter, because it is very expensive. We have a friend from an association who helps us a lot and buys some things for our daughter that we cannot afford. We have also had the support of Santa Casa da Misericórdia who provided food, before I had this last job. We usually do our shopping at Continente and we always look for all the promotions and discounts we can get. We also like to go to the Nepali shops in Martim Moniz, but we do not buy many things because products are more expensive there. I go to those shops maybe once a month, because with those products I can make some traditional Nepalese meals. If I could, and if I had more money, I would go more often to these small shops because the food is different and has a different quality. Many of these shops have their own agricultural production and sell the vegetables and fruits they produce directly in the shops. Also, the way these products are produced is identical to the way they are produced in Nepal, which is much better for us. Unfortunately, we do not have the opportunity to buy these products more often. We need to buy what is cheaper or on sale at the supermarket. “If a product is on promotion, we will buy it. If it is not on promotion, we will not buy it.” I am the one who manages the food at home, and I am the one who cooks most of the time. My husband helps, but he is sometimes slower. He does not like cooking, but he helps with other tasks. “We have neighbours who sometimes help us and give us some food. They make bacalhau à brás (salted codfish) and cozido à portuguesa (Portuguese stew). I like it very much. Since our

daughter is in school, she is already very used to eating more Portuguese food. So, at home we sometimes make Portuguese food and other times we make Nepali food. We do not want her to forget what Nepali food is like, because it is part of her culture. However, we understand that she needs this balance. For example, we in Nepal like to cook rice a lot, but our daughter likes spaghetti much more. So, we balance things out. Food is never wasted. Whatever we have left over, we use to eat the next day or we freeze what we can. We only throw food away if something is really bad. There are environmental issues that concern me because"(...) in the association where I work there are immigrant workers who have lost their jobs in agriculture because there is a lack of water to look after the crops." The heat is not helping, and there is a lack of water for agriculture and that is also a problem for jobs. Regarding energy, people could save a lot more. "I do not understand why some people have to keep the light on when we still have natural daylight. It is unnecessary." If more people saved more water and energy, this might help agriculture. "We need to change our mentality. I see people who will not put their plastic in the recycling bins. They mix everything together. All of this will affect us in the future. People do not have that sensitivity. I always do my recycling. I cannot feel good if I mix everything together in the bin. I separate. My house does not have much space to separate the rubbish, but I use a bag and put everything separately."

Quotes

For me, the big difficulty in Nepal is marriage, because of caste. If my husband belongs to a high caste and I belong to a low caste, it is fine. But since my caste was higher than my husband's, therefore my daughter would also have a lower caste. (...) My family knows about our marriage, but they do not talk and cannot tell the community.

For instance, when I went to the health centre with my daughter who was sick, no one spoke English. It was very difficult when we needed treatment. Also, when we went to buy things, it was very difficult because we could not communicate and ask for what we needed. If I want to buy meat for my daughter, we could not express what kind of meat we needed.

I do not understand why some people have to keep the light on when we still have natural daylight. It is unnecessary.

We need to change our mentality. I see people who will not put their plastic in the recycling bins. They mix everything together. All of this will affect us in the future. People do not have that sensitivity. I always do my recycling. I cannot feel good if I mix everything together in the bin. I separate. My house does not have much space to separate the rubbish, but I use a bag and put everything separately.

Keywords

Immigration; Casts; Nepal; Language; Religion

RL5_PT08, Portugal, A man who married late, works in the maintenance of green spaces and is very careful (great zeal) with food and the environment.

Narrative

My name is José, I was born in Lisbon and I am 59 years old. I am married and I have a son. I'm currently living in Cascais. I lived in Lisbon with my parents until I was 10 years old. I lived in the old part of Chiado, Grandela. I even helped on when there was a fire some decades ago. I cried a lot. I raised my son to never throw trash to the ground to prevent these kind of things. "I like to see the city clean, I don't throw garbage to the ground. (...) My son doesn't throw garbage to the floor, even if it's a beverage can, because I told him: Our country must be clean, not dirty!" I moved here with my parents and I live here since then. I've been in this neighbourhood with my wife for around 17 to 18 years now. Before that, when I was still single, I lived in another neighbourhood until I was 40 years old. I liked to live in Lisbon again but my wife thinks it is a lot of turmoil and the rents are highly priced. "I like my city very much, I love my city; if I talk about Lisbon it moves me to tears because I like it so much." As my parents were from Alentejo, I own a house there that I share with my cousins. I try to go there at least every year. During the pandemic period, I spent more time there. I married when I was 41 years old and I have a 16 years old son, he's a student and he's finishing the 11th grade. I would like it if he went to college. My wife had two miscarriages. Unfortunately, my parents have passed away. My mom had a tumour on her pancreas and passed away 16 years ago; my father had Alzheimer's and passed away 10 years ago. Although I am 59 years old, I miss them very much. (...) They lived with me, with my wife and my son. When I learned about my mother's health problem" (...) I even passed out, they had to brought me a glass of water. (...) I have tried by all means, I would even sell the houses and the lands I own in Alentejo to have my parents again. I always say: better loose the saddle than the horse, (...) but I could not save them..." I have a great passion for football. I play football since I was 6 years old. I even played professionally in a team and I came close to play for Benfica. When I was 16 or 17 years old I played for Manique, I also played for Poça do Estoril. After that, I started working in construction when I was 18 years old, and 8 years later I started working in a factory of stamps. I am currently working in Empresa da Câmara Municipal de Cascais and I've been there for 35 years. My work line is mostly connected to gardens and taking care of public green areas. I performed others tasks where I baked bread and cakes to distribute among children. I worked in a mill. I did that for 4 years and then started to work on gardens again. All that in the same company. In parallel, I have this vegetable garden where I spend a great deal of my time growing food. I love to own

my vegetable garden very much. “I get off work at two and a half every day, after that I go to my vegetable garden. I may leave here at ten in the evening. My wife says that sometimes she eats diner alone, but I have a passion for this, I like this so much!” I use the vegetables of my garden to make salads and soup, and I distribute what’s left of my vegetables to other people. “I give them tomatoes, bell peppers. I have given vegetables to all my neighbours. I give them to people I have never seen before, but I know which are good-hearted. I feel happy that way!” Regarding the food and how we shop for groceries, I use to go to the supermarket with my wife. We go to Continente, Pingo Doce or Lidl. We use our car to get around. It is my wife who knows what we need to buy and it is her who cooks most of the meals at home. Usually, we buy meat for the month and put it in the freezer. We also buy additional bread and freeze it. My wife mostly seeks the most cheap products but I don’t always agree with that. I try to seek for some quality options that are sometimes organic, but they are more expensive. I can have many organic products because of my vegetable garden. The products coming from my vegetable garden are organic. They taste different. Of course they grow slowly, but the result is entirely different. And it’s not only that, it’s also the care we put into the things we do. It makes a big difference. At meals I like very much to make salads and sometimes I have a little glass of wine, but only once in a while. When I drive I never drink. I am very careful with my health. For example, I never smoked. “I never put a cigarette in my mouth”. My father smoked during all his life, and because of that he had a tumour in one of his lips. When he was 66 years old, I had to make him quit smoking. I don’t want the same to happen to me, and I always tell my son to never smoke. I also like grilled food very much. I like every kind of food but I avoid eating some of them. I have cardiac atrophy, and because of that I avoid eating red meat on the recommendation of the doctor. When I make French fries, I always use some napkins to absorb well the grease. I take certain precautions. “Today, for example, I am going to eat some sausages, but I bought turkey ones, rolled up in savoy cabbage leaves, which is something I love. My son eats the sausage, but not the savoy cabbage. And I like steaks very much, I like hamburgers, I like tomato rice with fried fish, but I can’t eat too much of those things. I have to be careful. My wife eats more of those things, me not so much. Sometimes I eat different meals from her and my son to avoid certain foods. Sometimes they eat cow steaks and the next day they eat grilled pork chops with French fries, and I tell them that I cannot eat that. It’s too much red meat in a few days. I eat a different meal.” My wife had breast cancer, but still, she doesn’t take much of this care with food. She could take more. Another precaution I have is taking every morning a spoonful of propolis because it is very good to my immune system. My wife doesn’t like how it tastes, but I take it. I also eat a clove of garlic because it’s good for regulating my blood pressure. I also like to take a spoon of aloe vera syrup every morning on an empty stomach. They say it is very good to blood circulation, to the prostate and to a lot of other things. I’ve been taking that for 16 years now. I also look for valeriana to make tea because it helps me to calm down and sleep better. I have learned these things throughout my life with elderly people with more life experience, and they teach it to me. “There are also some people from Alentejo that told me that organic chemical-free food is better, and, as you will see here in my vegetable garden, I never used chemicals; the only thing I use is there, in that bag, it is horse manure and I know that you must dig the earth and mix it in there; I am very careful in what I do.” I am concerned about some environmental questions. I know we have too much pollution. “Now there is electric cars, isn’t there, hybrid. I sent my other car to the crushers because it was always letting out too

much smoke and I know it was causing too much pollution. “I am going to sell the car, I even told my wife it was because of the pollution. There are people out there using cars that pollute. To each his own; I have my opinion. I think people’s behaviour is something important and must be thought out. Information is available but there isn’t always the desire to get that information.” “I can say that Cascais Ambiente has been given information on that; if anything, we can ask them, but there are people who don’t want to. Wildfires is something that also worries me. I think there should be bigger penalties to those who cause fires. The drought and the water shortage also worries me. “(...) 10 years ago, there was people who lacked water and I went with a wheelbarrow and two 60 litres barrels, walking 3km, to stock up on water an elderly couple who hadn’t none of it, (...) old folks cannot die of thirst.” “(...) just the other day, in Alentejo, there was a unnecessarily open water hose in a vacant lot, and I said “for God’s sake, so maybe in the summer there will be water shortage, turn off the water. And they answered “the faucet is mine, let me waste how much I want to”. And I replied “do you think that’s correct? For God’s sake, turn off the water.” (...) After that the woman talked her husband into turning off the water”. In my opinion, “it is necessary to talk to people or to the town councils or to someone connected to the councils.” It was also important that higher educated people would be more present to help this process and inform some more those people, in partnership with the local authorities. There are several problems, it’s not only the waste of water, but also of food. “Look, there are people who throw to the garbage unbelievable things. I have seen here in the trash bin what they throw out, whole lettuces and tomatoes, they don’t make use of them. (...) The other day I even saw whole chickens wrapped in plastic, and I happen to sometimes check the expiration date, I see there’s still a month and a half left; I don’t know if they have plenty, but they throw it to the garbage.”

Quotes

I like to see the city clean, I don’t throw garbage to the ground. (...) My son doesn’t throw garbage to the floor, even if it’s a beverage can, because I told him: Our country must be clean, not dirty!

I get off work at two and a half every day, after that I go to my vegetable garden. I may leave here at ten in the evening. My wife says that sometimes she eats diner alone, but I have a passion for this, I like this so much!

Today, for example, I am going to eat some sausages, but I bought turkey ones, rolled up in savoy cabbage leaves, which is something I love. My son eats the sausage, but not the savoy cabbage. And I like steaks very much, I like hamburgers, I like tomato rice with fried fish, but I can’t eat too much of those things. I have to be careful. My wife eats more of those things, me not so much. Sometimes I eat different meals from her and my son to avoid certain foods. Sometimes they eat cow steaks and the next day they ear grilled pork chops with French fries, and I tell them that I cannot eat that. It’s too much red meat in a few days. I eat a different meal.

I am going to sell the car, I even told my wife it was because of the pollution. There are people out there using cars that pollute. To each his own; I have my opinion. I think

people's behaviour is something important and must be thought out. Information is available but there isn't always the desire to get that information.

(...) 10 years ago, there was people who lacked water and I went with a wheelbarrow and two 60 litres barrels, walking 3km, to stock up on water an elderly couple who hadn't none of it, (...) old folks cannot die of thirst.

(...) just the other day, in Alentejo, there was a unnecessarily open water hose in a vacant lot, and I said "for God's sake, so maybe in the summer there will be water shortage, turn off the water. And they answered "the faucet is mine, let me waste how much I want to". And I replied "do you think that's correct? For God's sake, turn off the water.

(...) After that the woman talked her husband into turning off the water.

Keywords

Memories, nostalgia, death, healthy food, carefulness, vegetable and fruit garden

RL5_PT09, Portugal, Man with early retirement, due to illness, uses the garden to supplement family income; he looks at the future with apprehension because he finds too much waste.

Narrative

I am a 63-year-old man, born in the inland far north of the country. At that time, when "my parents brought me to Lisbon when I was 3 years old (...) there was a lot of misery" in the North. And. "I went to school here", near Lisbon, "until the 4th grade" [primary school], but I left early, because "I started working (...) in construction at the age of 13". At the age of 18, I went to do my military service and then "returned to civil construction". But "there was a time when civil construction had a big crisis, and so I started working as a baker, at night, for many years". In intermediate years, "while I was benefiting from the Unemployment Fund, I took courses (...), such as gardening, shoemaking and community support", and thus I obtained the 6th grade level. In addition to my parents "we were 7 brothers; the eldest has died, my parents too (...) and my brothers and I all live close to

each other”, while “my nephews live on the other side”, on the south bank of the Tagus river. “I’m married, I have a daughter”, aged 31 and “I already have the house paid for”, which “helps a lot (...), given the level of the interest rates”... In view of “the way the food crisis is”, we have to choose food well, going “on promotions”. On the other hand, “I also cut my food a lot”. At home, with the family, “we often avoid fats” and as before “I abused this and that (...), I cut back on fried foods”. This “was more due to a health problem (...): about 3 years ago I had a stroke (...)” and then I had to adapt, also because I was “overweight” and because I had the pressure from “my family doctor”. Still “about a year ago I was almost 120 kilos (...) and now I’m 96”. So, I eat more “salads, grills, fish”, because at this age, I have to “be careful”. Also, “there are certain foods” that are bad for me, like “evening stir-fries”. So, at dinner “I often drink tea and toast, or dry cakes”, just. On a typical day, I start eating “the morning cereal”; then at lunch, as it is not possible to always be “making food”, it is frequent to take advantage of “some food that is left over from one day to the next”. Most of the food comes from the supermarket, shopping in the nearest one or getting it from another where “my wife works” for about 28 years. “Meat and sometimes fruit” often come from there. My wife “eats a little bit of everything” and “my daughter (...) likes her little things (...), very healthy”, which are “supermarket things”, also because she works in a supermarket where “they have those things which are then not sold, and then people can take it”. And there are certain things that my daughter “brings from there (...) and doesn’t have to pay for”. This is how it is done “for people to take, to avoid waste”. As “I am retired, I applied here for these community gardens, 6 years ago”. As I was called, this has been good because food is also sourced from the gardens: “now is the cabbage season (...), but here I had melons, courgettes, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers”, etc., “all organic; I practically don’t use (...) chemicals here”, because we can’t do it. We are aware of this, as we did “an internship (...) at the Parish Council”, for 3 days, about work in the garden. “But since I come from the North, I already had some agricultural insights”, which later got stronger. We don’t have any waste at home “because we use” the things that are left. This was the case with “some cabbages, which came from the garden”. “I was educated by my parents, in terms of food” and more: “I can draw (...) and I invent things”. So I make, for example, “the Christmas ‘roupa velha’, (...), with the cabbage, a bit of garlic and [leftover fish or meat, and/or some mix] (...), and I pass a little olive oil there, in the frying pan, and that’s it”. The food issue hasn’t changed much, unfortunately, in this society. For example, at the level of “Food Banks (...) one can see on the Internet, I don’t know if that is true” but it seems that supported people “send to the container (...) the garbage” things that are still within the deadline of validity. “I think people are very comfortable”, because they are getting that food “but maybe (...) they wanted some prawns or a fish”, or other things. And that makes me think about the environment: what we see “in the seas (...) soon there will be no fish, there will be nothing”. “Of course I worry about food”, mine and that of others: “because, if this is the way it is, I imagine what will be in the time of the grandchildren, their children and great-grandchildren (...), if this continues like this”. In terms of the future, something can be done to save. But it depends on each one. For example, “my house is comfortable”; being “a ground floor (...), when I did the works, I did the plumbing”, which in the bathroom “goes all along under the floor”. Thus, “the house warms up”. I was never in favour of the usual heating equipment: it wastes energy and is not healthy. And “to go somewhere, as I live close, I walk and come on foot”. I could even come by bus, because “I don’t pay anything; the pass is free” within the municipality. But I go on foot “taking it easy, I have

time!". And I do not believe much in a future depending on politicians, who "are all the same". There should be "more support". For example, "I've worked my whole life, I spent 38 years cashing into Social Security" and "my pension is 350 euros; a person who is unemployed earns five hundred and something". Of course, "I already have my house paid for, my wife has a good salary, but (...) now imagine that I was living alone! How was I going to survive with 350 euros?". I think that "they are taking advantage of it (...), they take advantage of it a lot". On the other hand, many people are right, like those who need to consume diesel. When government "increased diesel by 11 cents", that "is an exaggeration", and then "they did not lower 11 cents (...), but "only 1 cent". In fact, "I think there should be support for those farmers who come to sell at the markets", because they come from far away and arrive early – "at four" or "3 in the morning, they are already there and setting everything up" – and spend a lot of diesel; as diesel is expensive, they have to sell expensive products, right?!".

Quotes

While I was benefiting from the Unemployment Fund I took courses (...) such as gardening, shoemaking, community support.

Given the way the food crisis is going, we have to (...) go on promotions" "Food also comes from the gardens (...) and this is all organic.

They send it to the container (...), to the trash (...), which is still valid (...), so (...) why are people going to send this to the trash?

Keywords

Community garden; health problems; adaptive diet; use of leftovers; fight against food waste

RL5_PT10, Portugal, Immigrant woman, widow, she is involved in an "economy of gift and sharing", comprising food, within the principles of solidarity and mutual aid practices

Narrative

I am a 59-year-old woman from Guinea-Bissau, but I live in Portugal since 1996. That year I came to Portugal with my son so he could be treated for encephalitis, but he died. Then “I decided to stay to help my family in my homeland”: it was my mother, my children, my sister and my brother. In the meantime, all but one sister and one son died, but now I have grandchildren there too. In Portugal, my husband died in 2003 and “I stayed with a 2 and a half year old boy, who is now 21 years old and is studying (...)”... And I “thank the Portuguese government very, very much. And I am very grateful to the Town Hall, which gave me this little house, and they gave me this garden too, to help my life, and they are also helping me there with “a little basket from the Food Bank”... “I happen to have no reform”. But as I “have a pass”, given by the Town Hall, I even had “an accident in the bus and so far they haven’t given me any compensation, and that’s why I’m walking lame (...)”. And although my doctor has supported me with “disability papers (...)” until now “Social Security has not responded to me”... “I was receiving from the RSI” [Social Inclusion Income] “two hundred or so euros, but as my son is working they told me right away that they are going to cut that money and I will start receiving 97 euros... to feed (...)” and pay house rent, electricity, water, gas and even “Internet, because of my son studying. But I appreciate all the help because there are those who want to receive what I have from the basket” and they can’t. But I save on gas and electricity: with the cold “we put a blanket on; because these houses (...) let the cold in. We have to put plenty of blankets on the bed”. “My diet is more based on rice, pasta, beans, what they give me, chickpeas, fish, meat, things like that. Something also comes from my garden now (...): lettuce, tomato, cucumber, okra, those leaves that we have there, peppers, beans (...). My son eats with me (...) and it is the same as I eat”. And we use “the food from our homeland too, which is palm oil, dried fish, (...) peanuts, moamba”, which we ask (...); my sister sends it to me, orders it from there to here, and it takes time to arrive”. “I care about healthy food because I am diabetic. Just now I just got an injection at the Health Centre. My diabetes has just started, but it runs in the family. And then I have to eat just a little bit of each” and “I have to have a routine to eat (...) a little bit of everything (...). I can’t eat much bread, (...) much rice, (...) much pasta” (...) and my doctor said to stop drinking, but at least I can drink a small glass of red wine at mealtimes, but as she told me to, I don’t drink, I’m afraid, because of my health (...). My son understands that”, but he “has no problem”, because “he is healthy for now, thank God”. “I always go shopping, and I cook at home (...): a little salad (...), a little rice, if it’s grilled fish, or grilled meat, or boiled fish (...); even today I had spaghetti for lunch, spaghetti with fried fish. I really like fish (...); sometimes it’s tuna (...), sometimes I make sardines, too”. But “my son (...) eats very little salad; I tell him: look son, this is needed (...). It’s just that he’s still young, and he does gymnastics. He likes to buy those hamburger things, he goes to ‘Pingo Doce’ to buy those snacks and alike (...), and says: Mom, you don’t eat that food, but you can eat it. And I also make Cachupa (...). And we even had Cachupa lunch here with some people from the garden”. In an association to help people with eating” and “which is part of the Parish Council”, they “give training on what we should eat, how food should be made (...). And they teach us (...) how to make these foods that they give us, how we can make jam, to not let the food spoil, how we can make bread (...). And there is also the church, but I never go to church (...). And they also talk about the environment” but “we haven’t been to training for a long time (...)”. Regarding the leftover food, “we have to put it in a little

Tupperware and keep it in the fridge (...). There is usually not much waste, because (...) it is wrong to throw food out; we have to know (...) how to save food". And the food scraps that really have to go out, "we have to do recycling" and "(...) we always have to separate things". Over the last few years, "by chance we have changed a lot in the food (...): as we have a vegetable garden there, sometimes I make soup for dinner and I don't make rice (...), but salad is always. Sometimes I make spaghetti (...) or rice", but it is rare to make rice: "my son doesn't like it very much", because "he prefers pasta". And so, thanks to the garden, "I relate more to the people who are here in the garden, because here is a community garden; we pretend that we are from the same family (...)". About the coming times, "I think (...) that this is getting worse and worse". But "no one can give anyone anything here (...)" because people reject it: "even if they are hungry, they have a complex about receiving", whereas "in my land people receive". But "I like to eat with everyone, I like to call friends (...) because it's a habit (...) in my country".

Quotes

I am very grateful to the Town Hall, which gave me this little house, and they gave me this little vegetable garden too, to help my life, and they are also helping me with a little basket from the Food Bank (...).

My son never eats salad, he eats very little salad; I tell him: look son, this is needed in the body; we have to eat a little, a little bit of each. It's just that he's still young, and he does gymnastics. He likes to buy those hamburger things, he goes to 'Pingo Doce' to buy those snacks and alike (...)

Yesterday I made cachupa and he ate cachupa and had cachupa lunch today. He liked. Cachupa takes a lot of things... And we even had cachupa lunch here with some people from the garden (...)

Keywords

Municipal support; community support; community garden; health problems and disability; adaptive diet; long distance extended family resiliency; cultural intergenerational challenge

RL5_AT01, Austria, Living and eating in a single household on a limited budget

Narrative

My name is Ahmad, I am almost 60 and I live since around 30 years in Vienna. I was born in an Arabic country and I grew up in a typical larger family. I am living longer here in Vienna and have been working here many different jobs. Since some years I cannot work anymore. My budget is limited as I have to live with my depression illness and I cannot work regularly. When you get older, nutrition becomes a more important issue, it's not the same when you are 20 years old. The ideal meal, as I have heard from nutrition experts, is a salad and a main course with fish and chicken or potatoes. That's a fantastic dream for me. I am also satisfied with soup. Not that I'm very frugal, but it's also a good meal. I've lived with someone before, we cooked together, I can't stand up and cook for myself. It's not fun, it's expensive, and the effort for one person doesn't stand for it. When you live in a relationship it's different. I live alone and in recent years' food has become rather less important in my daily routine. I often eat convenience food, and from time to time I cook something. I go to different supermarkets, depending on my mood. I don't need very much either, but that leads to a one-sided diet, so I don't eat a sufficient amount of vegetables. That's how I get my food. There are lots of markets, I don't have to go to the market and get a full bag, I often just need a pizza or a frozen thing, then the meal is done for me. The fact that I then have a one-sided diet is a bad side effect. I eat pizza three times a week, I get a frozen pizza from the oven and I'm done. I often use ready-made meals, like fish or pizza, that's enough for me. That's why eating at home and cooking at home doesn't necessarily have anything to do with healthy eating for me. In the past, when I was working, I just stayed an extra hour and went out to eat for an hour. I was very satisfied.

But now in my financial situation it's almost more expensive when I cook myself, I feel it's cheaper to buy the ready food for a single person. It's cheaper than if I cook a good and balanced meal with everything in it, that costs a lot more.

In general, it's not about financial advantages or disadvantages, but about health. Eating only cheese, only pizza or only lobster is not good either, or only salad. You have to eat a balanced diet. I also like to eat organic food. When I buy organic, I notice the quality, it tastes different. But I don't have a bad conscience. If I buy a tomato and I keep it in the fridge for two months and it tastes like rubber, that irritates me.

But there is also the issue of the size of packaging of vegetables for instance: If I go to the supermarket and see potatoes by the kilo at a higher price, or normal potatoes in a package of 2 kilos, for example. I then have the choice of getting one (or one and a half) potatoes for the same price or two kilos of normal potatoes. I have to throw half of them away because I live alone. But I am forced to buy the large quantity, I don't need so many. If I buy cheaply, I actually buy expensively, because I throw half away. The pack is made for families, not for me. With all food, the packaging size is very big and the size and quantity is increasing more and more. I think I am a competent consumer, when I go to the open market and look at the fresh products, it's often the case that things don't last long. It looks as if they are made for the market day and for display, at home they stay fresh for only three hours. My relationship with and trust in the market refers to the quality I can find. Quality is not always very good, it is rather variable and there are no official standards referring strictly to the quality. In the big supermarkets there is also often something rotten. I don't really go shopping, maybe once in three months with my backpack to the vegetable market. The covered local market is convenient in winter, I go there rather irregularly, I don't need it much. There are also smaller portions at the

supermarket. The quality and control is very important, but often it doesn't fit. There is also a huge variety of products like 30 different kinds of cheese. If I need cheese, I see so many products so theoretically I need to systematically try them out to find the product I like most. Actually I have to begin with the first after some time as I forget already the different tastes at some point. The free market allows the many varieties and products but what happens if my chosen brand of cheese is not sold any longer? The variety goes much too far and it makes people believe that we have indeed overwhelming choices and infinite quantities of food. Organic food is better and indeed tasty, but I can't afford it. If I have a choice between organic or regular sweet potato, I will buy organic if they are the same price. In case there is a small difference, like lemons that cost 10 cents more, I will buy organic, but if the difference is 2 euros, then I decide to do not buy organic ingredients. People don't buy organic products because of the higher price, it is the natural behaviour of people to get the better product if the price fits well. Food waste is an important issue for me. I have negative feelings when tons of food are destroyed and treated as waste. It is not necessary that everything is transported first, then it is thrown away because of small deficits, like bananas with brown spots that are then thrown away. Indeed, the consumer has the choice to shop unpackaged fruit and vegetables, but it is not illegal to buy packed food. But I see an important aspect regards the packing. The seller or the super market can pack its products as they want. But the responsibility is not only on the consumer side. Only rules for the seller can reduce the unnecessary waste from packing those products. The free market economy is a good argument but our economy cannot produce waste to make look our products better, it is not worth to waste so much resources for having better looking products in the market. There are many other aspects, I think the environment is becoming also overloaded from food waste but I do not think that food contributes significant to climate change. You cannot eat day by day more than you need. We have all enough food, some have more, others have less but there is enough food available. It's easy to put the responsibility on the consumers and let the producers do what they want, you have to set up rules when it comes to food waste but also the packaging waste needs some regulation that cannot remain a burden for the consumers only.

Quotes

I live alone and food has become rather less important in my daily routine in recent years. I often eat convenience food, sometimes I cook. I go shopping in the supermarket, all kinds, depending on my mood. I don't need very much either, which also means that I have a one-sided diet, so I don't eat a lot of vegetables, but I put up with that. That's how I get my food.

There are a lot of open district markets, I don't have to go to the market and get a full bag, I often just need a pizza or a frozen thing, then the meal is done for me. The fact that I then have a one-sided diet is a bad side effect. I eat pizza three times a week, I get a frozen pizza from the oven and I'm done.

Keywords



Mental health and food; single household; modesty in food consumption; packaging of goods (quantity); convenience food; function of nutrition and enjoyment

RL5_AT02, Austria, A grandmother with no income, no social insurance prepares the good dinner and prepares lunch boxes for the day

Narrative

My name is Minna, I am 67 years old and live here in Vienna. Together we live with my son, he is 40 years old, his wife and our two grandchildren, they are 15 and 10 years old. My grandson is already 15 but he is autistic and the challenge is very demanding. Six of us live in a small flat, we are part of a minority. My daughter also lives in Vienna with her husband and her three children, but they live separately. We are a very traditional family, we go to church especially during the festivities. During the holidays we meet with the family and friends. All the young people have jobs, no one is unemployed, but we are old and sick. We have no own income, we have to cover all expenses with the income of our son and daughter-in-law. We live in Vienna thanks to their support. My husband does not work either. We are both ill and can not work any longer. I used to work in the glass houses in Vienna, but I was not registered here, so it was an informal occupation so I have no insurance and no right for a pension. Some years ago I got seriously ill, I had to stop working when I got a stroke. Working in the glass houses is a great strain on the body. In Vienna you have to work to live somehow well, I can't work any more.

Thanks to my son, I live an acceptable life, I must emphasise that. My daughter-in-law doesn't have a good salary. We don't have a social insurance card for any health services, so we depend on support. Thanks to the health facility that works on a volunteer basis, our local free of cost health advice centre, we can get all that we need. We are very grateful and especially the manager supports us Immigrants. We are happy that here in Austria such good support is provided by the clinic. It helps a lot. I get support with medication, we are also sent to visit doctors free of charge. It is much more than one could expect. For more social support from the municipality or from any other source we are not well informed. We are living here because of the children, our grandchildren. We can help the young family and for us it is also good.

It's getting more and more expensive here, the daily expenses are huge, even the price of the gas for heating is going up, everything, everything is getting more expensive. With the current inflation and price increase, I don't know how we will manage. It's almost impossible to save anything, my son never goes to a restaurant with his wife.

I cook at home, I prepare all meals as economic as possible, it should really only cost a little. Just like any grandma, I try to cook and manage our meals as good as possible, I think that's expected. We don't want any fancy food. My son and daughter-in-law go shopping.

All ingredients and food products are bought in the larger shops or at the market. I don't go shopping, I can't carry anything heavy. We eat healthy, thanks to my son and his wife, they bring home what is needed for cooking in a household. They know where to get something cheap. We go to the vegetable market for the fresh vegetables and fruit. For the vegetables we go shopping here at the district market at Reumannplatz, also from our home country are sellers. We buy the meat at the Großgrünmarkt, Vienna's largest fresh market for resale in the meat shop. Sometimes I go shopping too, but usually my son, because I can't carry heavy. He goes shopping with his wife, I take care of the children. My son consults with me about the what we need and I complete his shopping chart, that's how it works. He plans the monthly expenses and has an overview, so that he can pay all expenses, the accommodation, and all the other things.

During the day they all take a bag to work, our grandchildren also get a bag or a box with food. I prepare sandwiches and they are put on a hook, and everyone takes their pack. I cook for the evening, I prepare every day the dinner. It depends on the season what we eat, in winter also more meat, that's for sure. I cook our traditional food as stuffed peppers or any other good meal. During summer I cook more vegetables, that's logical. Meals as well depend on the family tradition, but some of us just don't eat everything. When everyone comes home we eat together our dinner and then we watch TV, just like any other normal family.

We celebrate the traditional festivities of course, I keep the special diet, I don't eat meat until Christmas, as tradition dictates. There has to be something for the grandchildren on the table, that's important. First we make sure that our grandchildren have everything, then we look after ourselves. I would like to buy for the grandchildren what they like to eat. Fruit, vegetables, sweets, I would like that. "You can't buy nothing, in every household you have to eat". You don't need only food, you also need clothes, shoes especially when winter is coming. And of course, you also need medicine, children get sick once in a while. When I came here 15 years ago, it was still cheap, you could fill up a whole shopping trolley for 15€. Now you don't get anything for 10 euros, a bread roll costs 23 cents, potatoes have also become very expensive, you can't get anything for that money. For 10 euros you can just get a sweet for the child and a juice, maybe water. Prices have increased a lot. We make a financial planning for the month, so that we have to eat till the last day. But if it happens that we don't have enough food, we have friends we can ask. We grit our teeth, sometimes someone helps. In the future, I don't know how we will manage with the current price increase, we need a little support. A few months ago there was a support for the increased household costs of 500€, but a financial support of this kind would be needed every 2-3 months.

We get our information about food from TV, we have TV from our country of origin, but we also watch out for more information on the tablet. My granddaughter helps me, the girl is very good at such things and can always find the right information.

We have a hard life but somehow we manage.

Quotes



When I came here 15 years ago, it was still cheap, you could fill up a whole shopping trolley for 15€. Now you don't get anything for 10 euros, a bread roll costs 23 cents, potatoes have also become very expensive, you can't get anything for that money. For 10 euros you can just get a sweet for the child and a juice, maybe water. Prices have increased a lot.

It's almost impossible to save anything, my son never goes to a restaurant with his wife. There has to be enough for the children, that's important.

Keywords

Migration and illegal work; rapid price increase of food and living costs; intergenerational living and workshare; living conditions of migrants with limited social rights

RL5_AT03, Austria, Living as an invalid and without social insurance abroad

Narrative

My name is Ivan, and I am living here in Vienna since more than 10 years, now I am 62. I have always worked hard to earn a living, but then I got sick and since 6 years I need medical assistance to treat my illnesses and I also need free of cost medical support as I have no valid social insurance. In the past I always worked without insurance, so I think I was not treated correctly, in total I count 4 months of health insurance, that is my official insurance time and it is insufficient to get a pension or any support. Living here is good compared to and the conditions in my Roma community where I come from. I would not get any medicine, I would not be able to pay for electricity and water. I don't receive any income or benefits so I need to stay here with my family. My family strongly supports me with my illness. I also find support here in the medical centre for the destitute. This is my only chance, I had several operations and I need medication all the time. In my case, I depend on the family and also my wife. She cooks for the family and I can only contribute very little to our modest living.

In the past I used to plan the family's finances for the week, or for the monthly expenses as the rent. Rents are also going up and the grandchildren need more and more space, they are growing.

Now I'm actually just happy to be alive, I'm just sick and dependent on help. I am an invalid and can hardly do any work.

Actually, the quality of all kinds of food stock is satisfying, especially in the supermarkets. In particular, in Vienna the stock in supermarkets is very good, of course it

has become more expensive. Before the Ukraine war the food stock, all kind of it, was more affordable. For a bake roll for instance, it's getting more and more expensive, from 12 cents it went to 15, 16 cents, now it's 23 cents. Fuel got also more expensive, it all relates to the war. We limit our spending a lot, well it's working out somehow. We know where it's cheaper, that's where my son shops, he takes care of it. He goes to the shops or to the open market, the Reumannplatz district market. You can get vegetables from there, but there are vegetables in every shop. Sometimes it is cheaper in the shop, but he buys wherever it is cheaper. At home we cook with an electric cooker, we used to have a gas cooker in the previous apartment. I've heard about food waste. Here is a shop that sells exceed food. I've forgotten the name of the shop. Not everyone can go there, you need a card to buy goods. They sell cheap stock, all almost out of date or maybe a month out of date. I have heard that lot of people go there, I know it exists but I've never been there. Of course you have to pay there too, it's not completely free but it's cheaper. I do not know if I am allowed to use this shop. However, I am invalid and I am not capable to go to the shop and carry goods home. I've never heard of anyone throwing food away, no I haven't seen that and I can't imagine that would be happening. I have seen rotten vegetables being thrown away, but nothing else. Nobody takes the rotten vegetables, even if they would be paid for it! I think we eat healthy. We consume vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, they are of good quality. I know that the vegetables come from the greenhouse. Of course, it hasn't the same taste as from a small garden, it is not grown by ourselves. There is a difference if it comes from the garden, freshly picked from the garden it tastes much better. In the past, we had a garden, so I know the taste and I know what how good vegetables must look, smell and taste. I think in my childhood there were people who had less than us now, they gave their children bread with oil, wrapped in a newspaper. All other children had some small money for a typical modest breakfast from the kiosk in front of the school. We don't have such situations anymore; we are better off. My family prepares sandwiches every day, they are will be a good lunch at work or school, and it's not oil, it is with sausage and vegetables inside. That's not different from what other people do, and it has to be enough! We have friends here; we see them on weekends. There are older people like us here in Vienna, but they still work, they don't have time during the week. I don't fast, but my wife does the usual vegetarian diet before important Christian festivities, when our tradition requests so. In Principle I don't eat milk or cheese, I haven't all my life, there are not many people who do so as it is a traditional part of our meals, I don't like sheep meat either. Without the support from my children and the cost-free health support from the medical centre, I would have been long gone from this world. I think we have raised the children well, now they care for us.

How can I say? It depends on politics how we can live here modestly.

Quotes

I've heard about food waste. Here is a shop that sells exceed food. I've forgotten the name of the shop. Not everyone can go there, you need a card to buy goods. They sell cheap stock, all almost out of date or maybe a month out of date. I have heard that lot of people go there, I know it exists but I've never been there. Of course you have to pay there too, it's not completely free but it's cheaper. I do not know if I am allowed to use this shop. However, I am invalid and I am not capable to go to the shop and carry goods home.

Keywords

Food social market; Food waste; good meal; increasing costs of food; family support for the elderly; intergenerational solidarity; migration setting

RL5_AT04, Austria, Our traditional cooking culture and my personal change to a healthy diet

Narrative

My name is Zühal, I live with my daughter, I've lived alone since I was 40, now I'm 68. I came to Vienna when I was 47, after my husband died. My husband died of alcoholism. First I came to Vienna, then my daughter and my son followed me. My daughter has been living here in Vienna for five years, she is a cleaning lady. Her husband lives abroad, they are separated. My son has been here longer, he also found our rented flats. My granddaughter got married at 25, my grandson is 22. I take care of my grandson as much as I can, I am very proud of him. He learned German in one and a half years, now he is studying at the university, he is an excellent student. I have no family in my country of origin, everyone has moved here. We used to speak our own language, but here communicate mostly in Turkish language, it's great that we speak this language. I don't speak German. I'm glad I can read, that wasn't a matter of course at home, but people helped me to learn it when I was a teenager. Our grandchildren do no longer speak our original language, but only Turkish and German.

I don't get a pension in Austria, but I have an international social security card, which is important. I didn't take care of my health for many years, I smoked until 8 years ago. The doctor said that if I continued to smoke, I would have to have my foot removed in a year's time, and I also got a stent. I chose life and I stopped to smoke. I came to the medical centre because of my blood pressure, it was 220 mmHg systolic or 180, now I'm back to 130, that's good. They support me a lot with the medication, I wouldn't be alive otherwise. I had medication from my country of origin, the doctor threw it in the bin straight away. Now I am doing well. I organise my daughter's household, our joint household. My daughter provides me with the money for shopping. I split and calculate so that we can cover the costs of a month. At the moment I manage to serve meals for three persons with around 500€ monthly. Mostly I do the shopping. It's expensive here, where I come from too. Now oil is 3 euros, I'm very frugal. I look through all the advertising leaflets in the post

box, there are always promotions. I then go and get the discounted products. I have to move myself anyway to stay healthy, that's important. We only buy what we need, not much more. We a little reserve at home, but that's dried beans and things like. I shop at the district open market. Turkish butchers offers good meat and the quality is fine. I also buy the vegetables there. I also go to the Turkish supermarket; the prices are acceptable. Recently, I bought canned beans for the first time. Otherwise, I have always cooked dried beans, which is the traditional way of preparation in my country.

I have heard of soy, but I haven't tried it yet. Actually, I know how vegetables should taste, I had a garden in the small village where I come from, where I grew myself onions, leeks, potatoes and all other vegetables. You don't need salt or a lot of spices, the vegetables from the own garden taste very good as they are. Here I can't find good tomatoes, but from the garden I like to eat them. A small piece of bread with it, and you can go on working in the garden. I often see vegetables at the market that are harvested unripe and then ripen until they arrive at the market, but you notice that in the taste. I recently found some delicious spinach, but it was packed and sold like that at the market, I never bought such clean spinach. In our village we kept pigs ourselves, that was very common. In Vienna, my son went to the Islamic school (Koranic school) and since then we changed our meat consumption to chicken, beef, lamb, it's healthier. We have to eat healthy, that is very important to us. I don't use sugar, honey, and from a chocolate I just taste. I used to eat that before but I changed my way of nutrition. I have always eaten dark bread, rarely also white but that is really not healthy. I cook for three people. My daughter is not so demanding, but my grandson is special. I cook for three, but I have to prepare everything extra for my grandson. He doesn't eat everything, he is very special and only eats certain things. I can't serve the food too hot or too cold. For him, the food has to be lovingly prepared, if he doesn't like the way it looks, he won't eat it. No matter if it's actually delicious. He then goes out and eats out, which is expensive, he then goes to MacDonald's.

We traditionally eat a lot of meat but I shall only cook meat that has little fat. Of course, cooking with little fat is difficult, we are not allowed to use a grill with fire here, we use a toaster for that, we put paper in it, it tastes almost the same. It is not so easy to cook our traditional dishes with chicken or beef, but somehow it works. We travel to Bulgaria during summer. When we come to our village, we buy a lamb, we prepare it traditionally, that's what I like best. Nothing is left over! For Bayram, you cook something different. You shop at the same places. The preparation and the meal itself is more festive, we arrange everything nicely. I am not allowed to fast because of my health problems. My son fasts during Ramadan, my grandson does too, you can learn to do that. I try to prepare as much as possible myself, everything at home, otherwise we cannot afford our food. I also prepare jam at home. But I'm not allowed to eat jam as I have diabetes and high blood pressure. I cook the traditional dishes like puff pastry, i.e. Börek, myself. I get a lot of information about food and what is healthy from the doctor. This is important to me and I always ask when I go for a check-up what I should change in my diet. I can eat everything, but only in small quantities. My friends here drink and eat quite a lot, maybe too much.

I have brought up my son not to drink and to live healthily, so that he doesn't start out like my husband.

Quotes

My son attended the Islamic school here, which was an important contact to the community in Vienna. That's why we stopped eating pork. At home, he said, he didn't want it anymore. We raised and slaughtered pigs ourselves where we come from.

I got much information from the doctor, here I ask a lot. With my high blood pressure and diabetes, I can eat what I want, but only in small amounts, I pay attention.

I've heard about soya, but I haven't tried that. Now I used canned beans once, we bought that from the Turkish shop. Otherwise, we always brought the dried hard beans from our country.

It's expensive here, where I come from too. Now the oil is three euros, I am very frugal. I look at advertising leaflets that are delivered in the post box. I then go to the shops and get the discounted products.

Keywords

Change of tradition in migration; Intergenerational solidarity; healthy food and religious values; change of food culture; Migration from rural to urban

RL5_AT05, Austria, Surviving my unemployment without sufficient money for food and my special diet

Narrative

My name is Nina, I live in a flat in Vienna and I am 38. I live in a relationship but my partner lives in the US. My family comes originally from ex-Yugoslavia; I prefer not to identify with a special ethnic background.

The experiences from the war are my traumas. I sat in the forest all day with a piece of bread and a piece of bacon. You get scared that you won't get enough to eat. I grew up in the war for a few years, then we fled to Vienna, I went to school here and I also went to university. Of course I have a big family, but my situation is not easy. I found a job now, but I still have a lot of debt because I was unemployed. My employer fired me, I was in a burnout and unemployed for almost 2 years. I have a house abroad, but I haven't visited it

for a while. When everything was going well, I didn't look too closely how much a litre of milk costs, for example. But when there were difficulties with the family and when I also had the costs for the house on my shoulders, and finally became unemployed, I got mental problems, that was a very stressful time. In that situation, I changed my grocery shopping. When you have 100€ a month for food, you have to plan everything very well. You find out that the 10-packs of rolls are cheap, but they are very unhealthy and not recommended at all. I got to know the own brands at Billa and Spar, both supermarkets have branches on my doorstep. My everyday diet was different during this time. I learned how to get by on a very small budget, it's not easy. The cheapest things were carbohydrates like rice, potatoes, bread rolls. In my crisis situation, I couldn't just go to the canteen and get something quickly for 7-8 euros, then something else in the evening. You can't do that in a crisis situation, you have to plan ahead. I started cooking in advance in a big pot. Then I portioned out the amount and froze it, I wouldn't have thought of that before. I had enough time and it was really much cheaper to prepare the food myself. If I wanted to eat, I had to decide, for example, I didn't have any toothpaste, then I had to do without meat, I just ate the cheapest potatoes for a few days... I also had no one to invite and nothing to offer. That was also a social withdrawal due to the lack of money. I didn't go to visit anyone either, you have to bring something with you, but I didn't have any money to buy a little something. That would be very embarrassing, I avoided that. I used to invite my wider family or neighbours over on Sunday, I live alone and I loved that. I stopped that completely, to this day I don't do that anymore.

I never throw anything away, I freeze everything and with my 1-person household situation there is no other way. I have a huge problem when food is thrown away, also because of my experience in the war. But I have to tell what has happened to me 2-3 times in the last years. I only eat chicken or pork. I bought packaged, very cheap chicken fillets. When I opened the package, the smell made me sick, it really stank and I had to throw it away.

In my crisis, I learned that I prefer to buy less meat and less often. I buy the better products, middle class. I do buy S-budget chicken fillets or pork cutlets, but I check really carefully that there's no water or anything in the packaging. I also look at the colour. You notice when you store cheaper potatoes that they're not as good. The cheap ones will start to sprout after a short time. Of course, you have to store good potatoes in a cool and dark place. The experiences from the war appear often in my head. I make sure I get the right food, also to reduce my weight. I'm not very environmentally friendly, I am not sure, when there's a promotion like a pineapple for 1 euro I grab it. Eating less meat is a good option for me, it is recommended to eat meat once or twice a week. Fish once a week and so on. I don't eat tofu, it doesn't taste good to me. I try to avoid anything that has been industrially processed.

I have a fundamental problem with soy. There are many reports on soy and documentaries on how it is genetically modified. The information is everywhere. As far as I know, this is not allowed in Austria. I don't know if one can understand where the soy comes from as an ingredient in a food. For example, in a small loaf with courgettes, potatoes or similar, if it says soya on the packaging, then I avoid it. I am ambivalent about organic food. Maybe it's a matter of trust, for me it's more organic if you know the farmer, I trust the person. Another thing about eggs. As a lorry driver, my brother also transported eggs called "free-range eggs". But the hens are in cages, only the brand name says "free-range", but the animals are in cages. Since then, I am sceptical when someone uses the

terms “free-range” or “organic”, or when I read something about it. I like to go to the market at Reumannplatz. When you see fresh fruit or vegetables, I like that very much. Whether they are fresh or not is a bit unclear. I can tell if food is good quality, I grew up on a farm. I can tell the quality by the smell, the look, the taste. But some vegetables at the market are more expensive than in the shop.

What I liked to purchase at the market were eggs, you have to go early. When my mother wasn't so ill, she and her partner would just get in the car and go somewhere in the country to buy vegetables and fruit. Especially with onions and potatoes, you notice the difference.

If you listen to good nutritionists, you will automatically favour the regional and seasonal. The exception you hear is orange, banana, pineapple. The recommendation is vegetables three times a day, fruit twice a day. That didn't always work in my crisis. I have tried ready-made meals, you can eat it, but you have to avoid all ready-made products or industrially processed foods. There's always a lot of sugar in them, which is very unhealthy, you then consume much more sugar than you originally want.

Quotes

I couldn't invite anyone during my crisis and unemployment. I couldn't offer anything. That was also a social withdrawal due to the lack of money. I didn't go to visit anyone either, you have to bring something, but I didn't have any money to buy a little something. That would be very embarrassing, I avoided that. I used to like to invite family or neighbours over on Sunday, I live alone and I loved that. I stopped that completely, to this day I don't do that anymore.

The cheapest thing was carbohydrates like rice, potatoes, bread rolls.

I'm a good recycler, I have a huge problem when food is thrown away. I never throw anything away.

Keywords

Single household unemployment; cost saving strategy; Healthy diet; regional products; Certification and brands of food

RL5_AT06, Austria, Supporting all the others that have less than me as an Artist

Narrative

My name is Ferdinand, I am 56 and I live alone. One of my sisters lives in Vienna, my brother has family here and he supports me financially, without him I wouldn't be able to make a living. I have a large circle of friends and actually I meet friends every day. I often work on editing films, so I'm always in contact with people. My income is very low, as is often the case with artists. I usually go out to visit friends in the evenings, I like that very much. I have had to take special medication for years because my immune system is weak. I also support many migrant families or individuals who need my support. Recently, a family of four from a Central Asian country lived with me for three months, now they moved out. I teach German voluntarily in, a private aid organisation supported by many volunteers. I am in contact with many cultures, my current friend and partner lives many flight hours away from here. I will visit this country as soon as I have enough financial resources again, but in the past I did not often travel. For me, the contact with many cultures is a great enrichment.

In my everyday life, it makes me nervous when I have to cook for myself. I always have the feeling that I'm wasting time when I cook. I try to eat healthy but I also have an incredible craving for sweets. In the supermarket I have to try like a little child to get past the sweets without taking anything, but most of the time a chocolate goes in the shopping basket. To compensate I buy a red pepper, flavonoids are very important and supposedly prevent cancer, but I usually do not buy organic peppers, they are not available at all or only rarely and they are very expensive. Something healthy is broccoli. Three times a week I buy broccoli, I eat it raw with peppers and onion, plus a mozzarella. I can actually get away with that. I have everything covered with that. Then when I'm working and doing something and I'm hungry, making my own salad would be too much work. I try to eat vegetables at least once a day. Something cooked doesn't fit my situation, raw vegetables are enough for me. I hardly ever eat cheese, it's too expensive for me, except for mozzarella at 90 cents from the SPAR. I can't taste much difference between an expensive Buffalo and a mozzarella from Italy. I drink coffee, about three to five a day, I love the sound and the ritual of frothing. I would never buy food supplies for a crisis situation. A carrot is enough for me, I get that from my friends too. I have enough own "fat" to last me a week, except coffee, I'm rather scared of that. Thank God I haven't had the experience of not having anything at all. There is such an incredibly cheap supply of sweets. I have friends who live here, they get by on 60 euros a month. They eat a lot and are incredibly fat. They know where to buy food stuff cheaply. There is cheap, high-calorie food, you don't need much money to buy it, like sugar, cola, chocolate. Like the cheapest chocolate here that my brother brings, although he could actually buy something good. I teach German as a volunteer, where I get the many foodstuffs that are already expired or almost expired, there is also cheese that I can't afford otherwise. What the students don't take because they already have it or don't like, it is left over, and I can take it. Shops, bakers, supermarkets just put it there. This happens about three times a week. That way there's no food waste and everyone is happy. I also invite guests, for example after the German course, and we have frozen pizza, which is quick, tastes good and is affordable.

I'm lucky that I have many friends from different countries, so I often get something to eat, but actually I can't always eat it. My Bangladeshi friends are 4-5 people living in one room, they sell newspapers, one cooks a day, they prepare fish and chicken with rice. This is cooked in incredibly large quantities. I always express that I'm a vegetarian, I don't

like meat, so I always get vegetables with rice. With Georgian or Uzbek families I always get something sweet, chocolate or something like that. With the Afghan friends there are always nibbles, very sweet. There is always tea and something sweet. The intensive agriculture and overproduction bother me a lot. Peppers are hardly organic, they are not so fresh either, at my local district market. You have to get there early, otherwise the fresh vegetables are gone. But I doubt whether they're organic. I'd have to get an organic box that is delivered at home, a special service by the organic producers, but I'd have to share it as the included quantities go beyond my needs.

I always buy organic eggs. With eggs, the farmer's name and phone number are on the packaging, the information is very clear, and you know what you're getting. With vegetables, there's nothing on the packaging, it's not clear who produced them. They are also more expensive, in some cases much more expensive. I would like to consciously buy the better and more expensive ones. But when I see a wilted organic pepper that is expensive and a plump conventional pepper next to it, I choose the nicer one. How to get healthy fresh vegetables is a question I haven't solved. For a single person it is not very easy to find really organic quality. My attempt with the "organic box" didn't work out, there is no one who would share that with me, because I live alone. If a family lives with me, they can't do much with the products either, there are other traditions. I think it's great that a good portion of the vegetables are produced in Vienna or in the surrounding area. If it says on the label that it comes from far away, I won't take it. For some time now, there has been much less pork, there are many halal products, even in sweets. I've tasted quite a few prepared salads; we didn't have that in the past. The baked goods that are fresh like from the baker, that's also new. I spend more on coffee than on food. For me, sitting among people and enjoying coffee is very important. I didn't have that in Indonesia, it's a different culture. When I only have 6 euros at the end of the month, I ask myself where I can get another coffee. Without the support of my brother, I would probably not be able to help the many people who are important to me. They have much less than I do. I give them German lessons and some of them live with me, somehow it works out.

Quotes

I spend for sure 60-65% on housing and energy, but if I can't have a coffee out once a day, then I feel I'm really missing the money. But a pepper, an onion and stuff, it always works out.

In my everyday life, it makes me nervous when I have to cook for myself. I always try to buy as little as possible, I hate it when food goes bad.

I had a family staying with me for a few months, I hosted them and they didn't have a place to live. I came home in the evening and the food was at the table, that was very pleasant.

So actually I don't have any stress as far as eating is concerned, because I am invited somewhere to eat probably 4-5 times a week. In between, today I bought a pepper.

Keywords

Solidarity with poverty; Intercultural experiences; Time efficient living; Information label on Products; Personal Food waste strategy

RL5_AT07, Austria, My precarious situation of living as a student in the times of increasing inflation

Narrative

My name is Adriana, I am 22 years old, and I am a music student. I moved out of my mother's house at the age of 17, overnight, so to speak. But I have a school leaving certificate and I am allowed to study here; I am a good piano player and I have been eating as healthy as possible since I started living on my own. I have often lived with friends, like now. My mother is also an artist, I haven't seen her for 4 years, we always had very little money. At the moment I live in a district of Vienna that is probably the most remote district, where the many migrants from Chile who fled from Pinochet have been housed. It's an interesting atmosphere there. With my friend we live with his grandmother, she is 78 and cooks for herself, it's not always easy. I think she is happy that we are there. I live next to a shopping centre. We have a good supermarket there, that's where we shop. For grandma, we buy food for about three days in advance, for us it's more like one day. But when we notice that we are running out of money, we buy for several days.

We don't pay rent, we wouldn't be able to do that. We also shop for grandma, she gives us a list and we shop, sometimes we pay. My friend's uncle also buys for her, some groceries are only available in the Asia Shop. Grandma doesn't like what's available here at the SPAR, she wants different ramen noodles, for example. When we buy something, everyone has a special place in the fridge. But it's quite an open situation, if you need something, you can take something from the other shelf. In the last two years, the prices have gone up a lot, it's unbelievable, if you want olive oil and so on. I switched to normal oil, it's just too expensive.

Grandma cooks Thai and Cambodian food, that's what she knows from her background. Me and my partner don't like it that much, but sometimes we ask her to cook something for us, and then she does. I live with my boyfriend's grandmother, that's her kitchen, so I don't dare to cook anything myself. I can cook and I love to cook.

The three of us come from three continents, Asia, America and Europe, so not everything always fits perfectly. For my boyfriend there always has to be meat at the table, otherwise he doesn't feel strong enough, that's his South American origin.

I think meat is actually unhealthy, the hormones get into your own body, that can't be healthy. With inflation, it's more complicated to eat what you want. I have to look at what's cheapest and durable, including spaghetti, rice and flour. We also buy large quantities and store them, it's cheaper, I also save time. The differences between supermarkets are big. When I need more, I prefer to go to a supermarket, HOFER (Aldi Süd), the vegetables are fresh there. I don't have enough money to shop in organic markets. There is a supermarket here that only sells vegan food, it's called "Pflanzilla" instead of "Billa", but I've never been there.

We make sure we use everything at home so we throw away as little as possible. There is now an APP for students where you can buy at a discount. When restaurants close in the evening or when supermarkets have leftovers, it's posted there. It's a great idea, but I don't actively use it yet. I had a look, you can get luxury goods for cheap money. The app is called ToGood2 go. You can pick up things like sushi, but I'm not sure if you don't get salmonella right away, so you need to use it carefully. I'm worried, now with the Ukraine war I can imagine future emergency or crisis situations, but maybe that's dramatising it. I googled and looked up what people are asking about food. A lot of people are currently looking at what foods will last, what foods they should have at home in a crisis, it's dystopian. I saw emergency packs in a supermarket, with gas cookers for cooking, that was very strange. I don't worry so much, but when I see such emergency pack and I get the information from the media about what is happening, I feel some pressure. Our society is already changing, climate change plays a big role. For example, if you eat less meat, then less CO₂ is produced, less water is used, that's important. People are not so motivated to change something.

In the last moment people will figure out that it doesn't work that way, that's humankind.

Quotes

I think I'll get better jobs in the future, the prizes won't always go up either and then eventually go down.

With inflation it is more complicated to eat what you want. I have to look at what is cheapest and durable at the moment, including spaghetti, rice and flour. We also buy large quantities and store them, it's cheaper, I save time too.

In the last two years' prices have gone up a lot, it's unbelievable, if you want olive oil and so on. I've switched to regular oil, it's just too expensive.

Keywords

Precarious situation of students; inflation and nutrition; mastering intergenerational and multi-ethnic households; modern solution to save food; non-access to sustainable or organic products.

RL5_AT08, Austria, Groceries and nutrition in my big intercultural family of five

Narrative

My name is Marion and I am 43. I used to live in Vienna for 20 years and also my twins are born in Vienna. My partner comes from West Africa, actually he holds a EU citizenship and I hold a German Passport. My partner has a daughter from his first marriage, she is 15, and now we have our twins, they are 10 years old. I work as Therapist, my partner is a builder, he works physically though work in the construction. Since a month I am living in Germany at the home of my mother with the entire Family, it is indeed a challenging situation but I can best report from my long time in Vienna. We first have to get everything ready and set up here, there is also only one shared kitchen with my mother, which is not very easy. In my family, there are 5 of us, we have very different experiences and cultures, which is also reflected in our situation. Our income was just enough in Vienna, but the rent was already very expensive, and the energy costs are also high, especially the heating was very expensive. We think we can make a better living here in our new house, my mother's house. We don't have that much money, we are five people, and the demands in the family are also different. I am very sensitive about the quality of the food we use for cooking. We are very keen on eating together in the evening, that is important to us. We don't always have time to go shopping together. I do the bigger shopping at SPAR, some at LIDL or HOFER. My husband bought his special groceries from a small shop. I bought the organic food that was on offer at DM. We bought fresh vegetables at the open market in a Vienna district. We bought a lot of fruit, vegetables and salad there. But the best organic salads are from the HOFER supermarket, which gets them from an organic farm run by the brother of a friend. So I know the producer. It's very important to me that groceries of any kind are organic, but I don't buy everything organic. We also have an organic supermarket around the corner in Vienna, but with the hungry eaters in the family, it is already very expensive when we consume normal groceries. There is a cultural difference in our family that I want to highlight. My husband and his daughter have different eating habits than me and our children. My husband is used to eating fish almost every day, preferably with rice. Rarely also meat. That suits a job in construction, which is already hard work. It's not ideal for his daughter, she's overweight, she's a schoolgirl. My husband doesn't have much money, but he still buys without looking at the money. Somehow the money is enough, but it's a critical situation. He buys what he needs, what suits him, but has sometimes been short of money. He doesn't like cheap meat either, it's packaged and of poor quality.

We discuss what we cook, but sometimes I cook without agreeing in advance. Sometimes I cook for the children and myself at lunchtime, and sometimes he cooks himself something he wants. He cooks about 1/3, of course he sees it differently, he claims that he cooks more often than I do, I don't share this perception. He cooks 2-3

times a week. In Vienna, we only have a big, warm meal together in the evening for dinner, the children get something at kindergarten, I take something to work. Often there is something left over for the next day. It's frugal and we don't throw anything away. My husband has experienced food shortages since he was a child, but he throws away the skin of a chicken, I would never do that. From my grandmother, for example, I learned not to leave anything in the packaging, so with yoghurt, for example. My grandmother didn't grow up in affluence. As far as environmental friendliness is concerned, it is most difficult to do without packaging. I think since long time about the fact that apple juice is made from concentrate. Why isn't the concentrate sold in a glass bottle?. In Germany, all PET bottles have a deposit, but that system doesn't exist in Austria, which is strange. My husband, for example, only uses soap for hygiene, just for everything, there is no packaging waste either, but with food we often have no choice.

I find the Ukraine crisis and its effects on flour and oil threatening. I am already concerned about the situation. I hope the conflict will end one day. I think it's possible that in the near future there will be goods we won't be able to buy. I find that a threatening development. The Ukraine crisis shows that dependency exists on a global scale, which is alarming. I think we have to think about regional supply, like my grandparents did.

We used to have a big pantry, like my grandmother's, where we processed a lot. We have now converted the pantry into a bathroom, now I was thinking that we actually need a pantry, in an emergency we don't need the bathroom, but the pantry.

Quotes

My husband doesn't have much money, but he buys what he needs, what suits him. He doesn't like the cheap meat either, it's packaged too.

I often have a discussion with the 15-year-old stepdaughter, she likes to leave a few spoons of yoghurt in the packaging. But when she sees a report on food destruction on TV, where it is reported that 1/3 of the world's food is thrown away, she is horrified, but she can't connect it to her own behaviour.

I think we need to think about regional supply, like my grandparents did. You used to have a big pantry, like my grandmother's, you processed a lot. We have now converted the pantry into a bathroom, now I was thinking that we actually need a pantry, in case of emergency, we don't need the bathroom; we need the pantry.

Keywords

Intercultural challenges; preference to purchase groceries instead of cost saving; Influence of the Ukraine war; pantry storage traditions and housing

RL5_AT09, Austria, My allergy, ethical and sustainability concerns

Narrative

My name is Roxana, I am 44 years old and I live in the city of Vienna, actually I am living here since two decades when I started to study at the art academy. I am struggling with my income and the high expenses since ever. However, since more than 10 years I rent a flat and I have a moderate living. I have no children and I have broken up with my family in the country I grew up. When I arrived here I did not know how to cook for myself, I have actually never learnt to cook but sometimes I give it a try. I am still married, but I am in divorce and despite the reason of divorce is not my fault, the process takes very long. I have spent all my savings on the divorce case and I have very little and irregular income from the sale of my paintings. As a painter and I need to use the daylight for my work, so I have no time to prepare food or go to the grocery store during day. Time is precious for me, especially in winter when the daylight is short. I purely have to use all the time I have for my artwork, the budget I can spend for living is limited. Some years ago I had a health crisis as I was eating completely unhealthy, I was living from Chips and sweets for some years. I have learnt to control my food habits over time.

I still get my life energy from sleeping rather than eating. For shopping I go to a certain supermarket, I know the products and I don't have to read through the ingredients. I am allergic to many products and I have to follow a special diet. It's very expensive, it must cost 2 to 3 times as much as a diet with the usual, normal food. I read through the ingredients, I am told not to eat wheat, gluten free if possible and I don't tolerate milk either. I might be able to drink goat's milk or sheep's milk, that works. My diet is mainly vegetables, potatoes and rice. I am allergic to pineapple, which makes me breathless, and I am also allergic to seafood, unfortunately. It's a pity that I can't eat such products. I can eat fish, I like it very much. Of course, the cost is much higher than if I could eat everything normal. The biggest challenge for me is to cook myself. For many people, it's a relaxing and creative thing to do. I'm constantly creative when I'm painting, to be creative in the evening as well, that's too much for me. I make thousands of decisions every day, cooking is too much for me. I cook so that I have something good to eat, not because I enjoy cooking. I'm not actually good at cooking, but I've started to get into it for a while now. I also have the appliances like a rice cooker, steamer, I use those. Actually, I've been planning to do a cooking course for a while, but I never find the time. It would be healthier if I could cook more. I wish I could have hot food more often. Maybe more fruits or vegetables, everything always has to be done quickly, so I don't have time to get anything. I love restaurants, but with my income I can only go out every 2-3 weeks.

I eat my breakfast with tea, I eat a special packaged cake every day, I tolerate it very well. I eat two times a day, now after a recent COVID infection I also eat three times a day. If I come home late, I might eat some coconut soup from a restaurant under my rented flat, I am the favourite customer there. I take vitamin D, vitamin B complex, some other homeopathic stuff, this has more to do with the condition after Corona than the normal eating habits.

But there is also another aspect. The Austrian kitchen is poor. There are only very simple dishes here, the cuisine is boring. In France, people take their time. Towards the south and west, there are many epicures, the Austrian eats like me. They eat because they are hungry. Austrian cuisine is like a picture with three or four colours, French cuisine is a picture with 1000 colours, in my country of origin cuisine is with 300 colours. With my small budget it is very difficult to cook meals I can eat. I think throwing away food is a strange habit. I learned from my grandmother that you don't throw food away. I actually "apologise" once I have to throw something away, it's not good. In order to do not throw anything away, I try to buy less or I regularly check the expiry date in the fridge. If something doesn't look too bad, I eat it, otherwise I have to throw it away. I'm against the way food is produced, it's like an industrial factory, it's cruel. It is especially cruel how cows and other animals are kept and exploited. I think that the energy, the hormones get into the products and we ingest that, that's the reason why I almost don't eat meat. It doesn't have to be, these are living beings and there has to be respect for creation. I buy chicken for my cat, I use gloves when I distribute the food. It hurts me, but the cat gets canned food, I don't know how it's produced. I already buy organic cat food, the chickens must have been happy. It's a market for owners who want to feed their animals healthy food, it's already expensive. I'm not sure what future will look like. If everything is poisoned, then we won't have anything to eat. We don't get fish that has swum freely in the ocean. Even the vegetables often only look visually like vegetables. If something can be kept for three months in the fridge then something can't be right, that worries me. It is also no longer possible to grow many varieties because there is a lack of diversity; it is possible that many kinds and sorts will no longer exist in the future. I do not eat genetically modified products, and I don't like soya for that reason. I have two worries. On the one hand, I'm afraid that I won't have enough money in the future to continue my special diet. I am very sensitive, but there are many ethical issues related to my style of eating. On the other hand, I do believe that the industrialisation of the food industry establishes a strong dependence on a whole system of global players. The market economy and big companies dictate taste and what is at all available to eat in the first place. The real conflict is between big companies and society, not within the society itself. Actually, I should eat better only regional products. I could join a group of self-producing people. It's not enough to buy the vegetables from the farmers. I don't have a car to go to the countryside and get good food, I don't have the resources.

Quotes

15 years ago when I came to Austria, as a student, I lived on chips, also on ready-made soups from the packet. Boiled potatoes and so on.

For my cat I buy chicken, I use gloves. It hurts me, but the cat gets canned food, I don't know how it's produced. I buy organic cat food there, the chickens must have been happy.

The conflict is not between individuals, it's between the companies, what's happening in the market and then the population. This policy has been around for 50 or 100 years, now the results are visible.

From Nestle, I don't buy anything from this company. They don't sell ethically, I don't buy from them. I often get the information from the internet. I do not refer to mainstream media, I read the information in English. Sometimes articles pop up on the food topic, like about Nestle, Shell or similar critical reporting.

Keywords

Special allergic diet; animal health; dictate of the food industry; time constraints with food preparation; cross country comparison of food; mistrust in information and establishing a system of own beliefs

RL5_AT10, Austria, My challenges with vegan nutrition and the intergenerational challenge of societal change

Narrative

My name is Walter, I am 25 and recently I was for 6 months unemployed. During that time, I was partly living at my parents' home, but also at the home of my future wife and girlfriend. Indeed, I am living vegan and it was a challenging time. We use to cook every day and I also use only special products to prepare my vegan or vegetarian meal. For the last six months I was unemployed, I could not buy the organic products from BILLA when I went shopping, I went to other cheaper shops. They also have good groceries there. In this situation, I didn't purchase many vegan substitute products, but just the normal yoghurt. I'm already frugal and therefore a bit financially secure, that's what I've learned, but I've had to make sacrifices. Eating a vegan diet is much more expensive than eating an average diet. Inflation has made it more expensive, one of the special products now costs 5.5 instead of 4 euros. Oat milk, for example, has also gone up, the package has simply become smaller. The packaging size is now 0.75l instead of one litre. I'm already worried, I wouldn't want to change my eating habits, but the higher price already stands in the way. Since I don't have an income, I no longer buy organic cheese, but the supermarket chain's own brand, there's already a difference in quality, it tastes like plastic. The decision about cooking and dishes depends on the weekly schedule, who has time to cook prepares the dishes. If there's something at home, I supplement that with shopping. I don't cook according to quantity or recipe.

Each individual must take care that our society does not throw food away, so I don't buy too much. If there is anything left over, we take it to work the next day or eat it at home. We freeze almost nothing. Actually, the trade companies have to become active,

there is a lot of groceries that are thrown away by the traders or market chains. Food is a valuable and precious good, we should think about it. Food waste is an issue that could be given more attention in society.

It is dramatic worldwide that food is being destroyed. I would like to see less food wasted and food given to people who need it.

My sister looks at regional and seasonal products. In the last few years our shopping and cooking has changed because we all actually eat less meat. My sister eats local, she doesn't buy exotic fruits like bananas either, she looks at that. We're all spoiled and we want everything the same all the time and to a huge extent, we have to cut back on our demands. When you go into a shop there's a huge choice, there's really everything, it's a lot. We are overwhelmed by consumption and all the offers, so it is difficult for everyone to cut back on consumption and buy more locally or seasonally. If the choice was smaller, like it used to be at smaller shops, people would think differently.

The mindset has changed, people have changed their shopping and consumption behaviour. Everyone lives in their comfort zone. People won't immediately take a dish they like off their menu. But there can be events that can change a mind. For example, my grandma doesn't understand that I have changed my diet. Many young people like to eat vegetarian or vegan, they just don't want to eat dead animals because they find it bizarre. I think the youth is already putting quite a lot of pressure on the older generation. The young generation should also inform the older generation that you don't just have to eat meat, the older generation can also learn something. The food industry is also important when it comes to climate protection. Young people think much more about the future, I think there is a lot of concern, but it is also the search for solutions like climate protection.

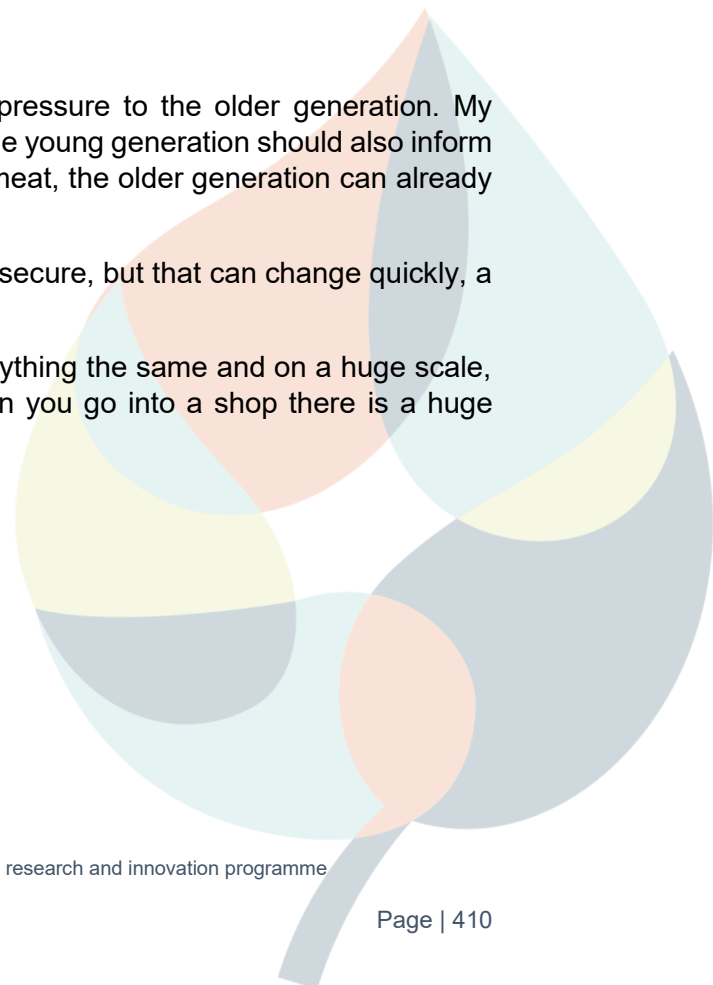
Many of the important movements are initiated by young people who give an impulse to the outside world, they should be listened to.

Quotes

I think the youth are already giving quite a lot of pressure to the older generation. My grandma doesn't understand that I have changed. The young generation should also inform the older generation that you don't just have to eat meat, the older generation can already learn too.

With the global situation, the food supply is already secure, but that can change quickly, a lot of things come via long routes and supply chains

We are all spoiled and we always want to have everything the same and on a huge scale, you would have to scale back your demands. When you go into a shop there is a huge selection, there really is everything, it's a lot.



Research Line 6: Improving food security and healthy diets in vulnerable communities, through local production, informed consumption practices and circularity

RL6_DE01, Germany, “Change is only a matter of determination”

Narrative

I am a 44-year-old singer from Romania, who moved to Germany 11 years ago. I am singing in two bands, and besides that I have also been working as English teacher at a private language school in Aalen, Germany. When it comes to food and what I eat, I first of all try to listen to my body and its needs, but this is not always that easy. Sometimes I crave, for example, sweets, but it's not actually the chocolate that my body needs e.g. chocolate, but some other substances/things. So, I have to “translate” the cravings. In general, my diet is vegetarian. Eating a fully vegan diet would be a bit “too much” for me, since I love eggs and I sometimes eat a bit of fish; though then usually only fish from conserves or a small piece of, e.g., salmon which is then cooked by my partner in such way that it does not taste like fish.

My partner still eats meat, but he does not eat any kind of meat and not too often. He usually buys meat from “good” sources and eats it only about once a week. Groceries are always shopped by my partner, since he knows what he needs, but he also asks me what we should cook and what I need. But we often cook somewhat separately, since he eats meat and I eat vegetarian. We try to buy seasonal food and from regional sources at farmers markets and in the supermarket. We also usually look for organic products (but not always) and for what is on sale.

My decision to eat vegetarian is based on environmental concerns and also animal ethics. A series of events have led me to become vegetarian. When I was a child, my grandparents had animals and once I heard the pig's cry when it was slaughtered and

afterwards, I was asked to eat its ears, and this was too much for me, I cried, and could not eat it. Also, I've seen a few movies/documentaries about the living conditions for the animals. And finally, another "trauma" that eventually reinforced my decision to eat vegetarian was when being with my previous partner. He ate meat almost every day and I was supposed to cook it, and it smelled so badly, so I stopped eating meat entirely. This was 12 years ago. But meat is also full of antibiotics and there is a lot of genetic modification going on in the food sector, of which I am very sceptical. My cousin, for example, developed breasts when he was 12 and needed to take medication for it. This had been associated with genetically modified food. Likewise, the general rise of things like gluten- and lactose intolerance are something that has increased so much lately, which in my opinion is the result of what we eat today, i.e., genetically modified, processed foods, milk from cows who had a forced lactation processes upon them, etc. But in Germany, I should not talk too openly about this, because people don't want to hear it and judge me in a negative way based on my thoughts and concerns.

Anyway, when it comes to obstacles or so, I did not experience any significant barriers or obstacles to the change of my diet and habits. I just had to take the decision and then do it. In general, I try to reduce my impact on the environment with the choices I take, and I use my choices also to in some way positively contribute to the environment. Also, we try to minimise food waste as much as possible, we buy what we need and not more, and what we can also consume in time. This is also in general my philosophy: Not consume more than what is needed. What I have experienced throughout my life and my upbringing have certainly shaped my food habits. I grew up in the communist era, and in my family there used to always be the fear to not have enough food. We only got rationed portions, and in the city, we were reliant on the amounts determined by the authorities.

"When I was a kid, my family had very little and always feared not to have enough, to starve to death, and there was always something in the pantry".

My grandparents lived on the countryside and had a garden where they could at least grow food. Since we had this family on the countryside, they could provide us with meat, vegetables, etc., and thus helped us hang a little bit more food. It has shaped my value of food, my aversion of wasting food, and I also know how food can really taste. Now, the food does not taste anymore like this good. My dream also is to at some point have an own garden to grow food. Right now we are at least growing some tomatoes and paprika (my partner is half-Hungarian and so paprika is a must-have for him) on the balcony.

Quotes

Just take the decision and do it

It was no sacrifice for me to change to a vegetarian diet.

My dream is to sometime in the future have a small own garden.

Keywords



Vegetarian, determination, trauma, partner support, genetically modified food, processed food, food waste, growing food, childhood experiences

RL6_DE02, Germany, Vegetarian mother trying to contribute positively to her child's future but meeting obstacles and resistance

Narrative

I am a 31-year-old mother of a one-year-old boy and married, living in the city of Mannheim, Germany. I used to work as a nurse, but a few years ago I decided to do a university degree on the side. After finishing the degrees, I quit the job entirely and started working on my PhD focused on (elderly) care. I would love to be able to say that I cook seasonal and regional, but I think in reality this is not so often the case. I first of all look for recipes according to what I like taste-wise, although I think that what I get shown on Pinterest – the platform where I look for recipes quite often – I tend to get shown dishes according to what is seasonal. In the day-to-day life, we also have some standard “go-to’s”, like recipes we cook frequently, and which are fast and simple to prepare, like lentils Bolognese or so. Similarly, in terms of grocery shopping we usually buy a standard repertoire of things, among fruits for example apples and bananas. I know that bananas are never seasonal here in the region, but they are good for the child to eat. In general, our decisions on what we eat are not necessarily based on values or so, but rather on practicality, i.e., what is simple to cook and good for the kid to eat. However, we try to mainly buy organic or ideally Demeter-certified as much as we can, and ideally of regional and seasonal source; but this is very hard to unite. Here in the region, I usually have to decide between either buying organic or from regional production, which I find very sad actually. When I got pregnant, I thought more about the need to contribute to this world in a positive way and a year ago I became vegetarian. My partner had already been vegetarian for 1 ½ years before. Nonetheless, we let our son try meat if he wants to, and if he doesn't eat it up, we eat the rest instead of throwing it away. Still, we never buy meat or meat products ourselves.

I agree that eating a vegan diet may be good for the environment and for the animals, considering their well-being and the amounts of soy production which are used alone to feed the animals. But I don't make it yet to eat vegan myself since I love cheese, for example, very much. Next to eating no meat it is probably also great for the environment to eat only regionally produced food to have as little CO₂ from transportation, if that was possible. But then so many products could not be consumed anymore, like rice, and so I find it very difficult. Though I could probably also dive deeper into the information about food, and learn more about what is and can actually be produced around here. As

regards the importance of eating environmentally friendly, in my opinion eating organic food is important because it is healthier for us in the family, seeing that it has fewer pesticides, etc. Furthermore, eating vegetarian is better for the environment (methane emissions, land use) and for animal wellbeing; and e.g. Demeter-certified producers also do not use monocrops, which is better for the soils and many other things.

Thinking about factors that happened during my dietary changes, I started focusing on buying mainly organic food once I was finished with university and could afford it. Buying organic – or especially also Demeter certified foods – certainly is something one must be able to afford, since the products (especially Demeter) are clearly more expensive. A main obstacle to switching to a vegetarian diet was the fact that I like meat, while enablers were definitely the wider availability of vegetarian alternatives nowadays, also in restaurants; and the fact that my husband had already stopped eating meat 1 ½ years before me. This supportive context was very important. I would not say that my upbringing affected my dietary switch, and looking at my gender, I have in mind the discussions of iron intake for women and its association to the “need” to eat meat, which was a thought that I used to have in mind in the past maybe. But generally, I would not say that my gender had any impact on my diet. Rather than that, I think it was mainly my social environment that strongly influenced my dietary changes. The circle of friends and social environment where we live was generally very important in fostering my decision towards a more environmentally friendly diet. However, looking at the wider family (who live on the countryside, ca. 1 ½ hours away), eating organic foods, less meat or vegetarian is not a thing. In fact, in the family we continue meeting much resistance and unbelief that we eat vegetarian. At family gatherings, they continue ignoring or not accepting that we eat vegetarian, and if we would not bring food for ourselves, we would often end up without any food. Also, they frequently comment our food in negative ways, which I find quite disrespectful and difficult to endure, since after all we also don’t comment on their choices or go about as moral apologists or so, telling everyone what the right diet is. Still, this has not prevented us from adhering to the vegetarian diet. Gradually, our mothers for example have started accepting our choice. They sometimes even overdo it by buying many vegetarian replacement products, which we would not even need; like, cheese would do it as well.

Quotes

I would love to be able to say that I cook seasonal and regional, but I think in reality this is not so often the case.

Here in the region, I usually have to choose between buying organic or regionally produced, which I find very sad.

At family gatherings they still do not think in us not eating meat, they provide meat only and that’s it.

They also comment when we bring BBQ cheese that “irg, but this tastes like shoe sole”, but I also don’t go about and comment saying you have a corpse on the grill, I find it disrespectful and difficult.

Keywords

Vegetarian, organic, practicality, availability, affordability, regional, resistance, child, social environment, partner support, food labels

RL6_DE03, Germany, Food is only one part of a bigger whole

Narrative

I am a 55-year-old single mother of a now grown-up daughter. I lived for many years abroad, among other things in the Netherlands (I was married to a Dutch), and I have been working on and off in many different, not very well paid jobs. Originally, I come from a small town in eastern Baden-Württemberg, where I moved back to only recently. There I am currently working for an older lady, being responsible for grocery shopping, cooking, and food in general.

A few years ago, I decided that my values are particularly important when it comes to deciding what food to buy and eat. The first priority is that it is produced organically, ideally Demeter-certified since their standards are particularly high. Secondary criteria are the price and then also that I try to buy unpackaged foods. It is generally very important to me to consider the climate impacts of food, that is, where the food comes from (transportation distances), and the seasonality of food. I also think that we have to bear in mind that with our shopping choices, with creating demand for certain products, we send certain signals to the producers that they shall produce it, and that is something I don't want to. And I can say that I have the luxury that at work, i.e. for the lady I work for, I can freely choose what to buy; others in similar positions might be obliged to focus mainly on the price.

I agree that eating vegan can be a good decision and I'm also open to their arguments for it, but I am against any obligation to do so, since then one usually quickly creates resistance. I think that this is something everyone has to decide for themselves. I rather try to make other people aware of what meat they are eating, educate about the implications of cheap meat and why one may consider buying meat from 'better' sources. In general, in my life I try to make the people around me aware of the food they eat, inform them, educate them mildly. I don't eat vegetarian myself, but I don't like eating meat very much anyway, so I buy little and whenever I buy, I buy it consciously i.e. looking for that it is certified (organic, Demeter, regional) and from a butcher that respects animal wellbeing. Where I am working right now, we are unfortunately buying meat also from Bofrost, a company that delivers frozen foods to subscribed people. I don't know where their meat

comes from. I would prefer to do it differently, but buying food there is an established practice of the lady I work for, which I do not want to meddle in.

When it comes to further engagements with or for environmentally friendly nutrition, in the past when I was living in the Netherlands, I was part of an urban gardening project. There I experienced what difference it makes to grow vegetables and fruit oneself, to eat freshly, self-grown, organic food. Now, I am beginning to getting settled back in Germany and I am not engaged yet in many initiatives. But for a beginning, I try to get involved passively in certain initiatives, like I recently joined the friends of nature, explicitly because they are against nuclear energy and their work is local-focused. Before settling here, I worked for two years on different farms focused on ecological production, where I tried to mainly eat ecological, but unfortunately it was not always possible.

My philosophy is guided by the idea of “what is it worth to me?” in the sense that I think that everything we do and eat has an impact on us, and hence I also ask myself what the impact on myself is worth and the value attached to it. Food is only one part of a bigger whole, like, I also decided explicitly that I do not get a car but use the bicycle. So I focus on eating food that does me well. But this was not always like that. I grew up in a family focused on buying all at the discount supermarket ALDI and focused on buying as cheap as possible. When I left home, I started off with having the idea that once I have enough money it will be that I can buy organic foods. But over the time, I realised that if I buy high quality food, I actually need less food because it satiates much better and I don't have to buy all this “stuffing material” as I call it. So, through eating differently and more consciously, in the end I actually save much money because I need to buy less. It is a process not so much related to eating, but more to the thinking about oneself and what worth one sees in oneself generally. Many people who are eating cheap foods, who complain about not having enough money, have what I call a “poverty thinking”, which is what I also had for a long time, assuming that “I can't do this, I don't have it, I don't have the money for it”, but which is just not true. It is very much related to the worth one gives to oneself generally. But it is a difficult process to change such thinking, and that is also why I oppose any obligations or so put onto others without knowing the greater life circumstances and difficulties of people. What I think should be focused more on is to make these people more aware of their own worth, and how their worth is connected to things like eating good food, or also wearing fairly produced clothes, etc. Looking at myself, it is difficult to pinpoint a moment that changed my mindset, I rather think that it was a long process. Small scenes that gradually made me aware of my thought patterns and of that what I radiate, that is also what I get back. Meditation, yoga, fasting, and many other things that developed over time were key in this process, too.

The biggest obstacle to environmentally friendly consumption is the limited offer accessible in my region, and the constant need to decide between e.g. buying organic OR unpackaged, whether to cycle 10 km in order to buy something locally produced, etc., which time-and-again demands a lot of self-motivation. Also, the offer in restaurants is very limited, and the understanding and knowledge of people as well, e.g., my daughter ordering vegetarian pizza and getting one with sauce Bolognese, or me getting plain, boiled vegetables. On the other hand, what helps is that the offer has expanded to, and within, the average supermarkets, which certainly changed also thanks to a changing consumer demand. Furthermore, the realisation of that it does not necessarily get more expensive if I buy better food helped very much. My upbringing may not have had so much of an impact, considering that my brother, despite earning several times more than I

still tries to buy only the cheapest; I think most important have been other social contexts after leaving home, openness to change, and being immersed in different phases of (life) change, moving around and living at different places (e.g., living in London at a time when vegetarian eating started to become a big thing), as well as different formative experiences with e.g. meat eating.

Quotes

How much energy is put into something, this energy it gives also back to you.

I consider very much, what is it worth to me?

Food is only one part of a bigger whole.

Since I started eating much more consciously, I live cheaper since I do not need to buy all this 'stuffing material'.

I also had this poverty thinking that I could not afford buying better food (...), but is just not true, and it is related very much to the worth one attributes to oneself.

When people do groceries and they literally throw the food into their shopping baskets, I always ask myself, are you aware that this is what you will later have on your plate? And it relates very much to how they value the food.

What I think should be focused more on is to make these people more aware of their own worth, and how their worth is connected to things like eating good food.

Keywords

Value, practices, lifestyle, poverty thinking, thought patterns, climate, rural, access, money, urban gardening, food labels, own worth, cultural culinary traditions

RL6_DE04, Germany, Greek mother struggling with the possibilities and impossibilities of eating environmentally friendly in Berlin

Narrative

I am a 32-year-old female Greek living in Berlin, I am married and we have one 2 ½ years old child. I am trained agronomist and I am orthodox. I do groceries once a week, but living in Germany I find it difficult to find good, e.g., vegetables and fruits. Coming from Greece, I have very high standards for taste, and it is difficult to find tasty fresh food here. For that reason, I also usually choose to buy frozen fruits rather than fresh ones. In Germany, it is also difficult to find seasonal vegetables and fruits in supermarkets, they usually have everything all year around. So I try to go to farmers markets or farmers' shops selling seasonal and regionally produced food.

I agree that eating fully vegan or vegetarian would be better for the environment, but I am not brave enough to stop eating meat and dairy. What I do is that I fast at least three times a year, that is, I eat vegan for at least 1 ½ months at least three times a year. However, I do not think that a vegan diet is healthy, since many minerals are not covered well. But I do agree that eating only dairy but not meat would be ok. I also try to avoid eating beef due to the CO2 emissions, and I stopped eating some other foods due to their environmental impacts, for example I stopped eating avocados because of their large water needs.

When thinking about environmentally friendly eating, I associate it with food that is grown without pesticides and chemicals, that is produced nearby, and that is sold without packaging. Consistent with that, I also try to buy as much unpackaged as possible. But the main barrier to eat more environmentally friendly than we do is that it is unaffordable. I cannot financially afford buying everything from organic/eco-stores, so we have split it a bit. We buy certain vegetables from eco-stores, while other things in their 'regular' version. Also, my father-in-law has a vegetable garden in Greece, and we get food from him which we can then freeze or conserve and use later in the year. When we were still living in Greece, we could grow some food ourselves and eat seasonal food from our garden. But again, in Germany this is not so easy because even though there are gardens to rent, my work and time schedules do not permit me to do it.

When I was pregnant and when breastfeeding, I started imagining what a better world would look like, and I started to think more about sustainable and environmentally friendly diets. This was more or less three years ago, and it was when I started to change what I eat. However, we need to change the minds of the consumers more generally, towards focusing not only on price or on how food looks on the surface ("imperfect" shapes, etc.). What helped me the most at changing my own habits was the fact that most of my friends also think about these things, many of them are vegetarian or vegan. Also, I grew up in a family in which we never ate meat very much or so. In addition, my parents produce very little plastic garbage, they produce food themselves, they exchange food with their neighbours, and hence by default they already eat much guided by the seasons, what can be grown and produced by themselves, and with very little packaging and waste. This background and upbringing has certainly shaped me very much.

Quotes

I am not brave enough to stop eating meat and dairy.

Eating more environmentally friendly is unaffordable

I live in Germany, and coming from Greece I have very high standards for taste, and it is difficult to find tasty fresh food here.

In Germany people really care about the environment and most of my friends are vegan or vegetarians, so they helped me to change my habits and my point of view.

Keywords

Vegan fasting, child, Greek, Mediterranean diet, taste, cultural culinary traditions, unpackaged, gardening, growing food, social environment, affordability

RL6_DE05, Germany, Severe sickness came with a metamorphosis and the reconsideration of food

Narrative

I am a 56-year-old single woman living with a dog, and I have two grown up children that I raised for most years together with my ex-husband. I have been living in the city of Mannheim for several years now, in an apartment in a very nice and central neighbourhood. Before that I lived in a small village nearby. I used to work as waitress in a hotel before starting a few years ago to work as an administrator in the city archive. I can walk to my work, which I love, and I can walk to many other places, including supermarkets and the farmers market, too. Yet a severe sickness that struck me ca 2 years ago left certain parts of my body disabled and made it more difficult for me to move around. But it is getting better and better again. When deciding what to buy and eat I usually look for what looks nice, in the sense that it is not something where one piece looks exactly as the rest. I also consider that it comes from regional sources and fits into the season (i.e., is seasonal), and in the recent past I have also started to look a lot on its packaging, i.e., that ideally it is unpackaged or only little packaged, though this is very difficult to obtain. I eat everything and I do not think that it helps the environment much if one eats only vegan. It might be due to me missing certain pieces of information and knowledge, but on the whole, in my opinion the important thing is a balanced consumption, and as long as one eats in balanced ways, nothing in excess, it does not necessarily harm the environment. But honestly, I don't know what kind of diet is best or

better for the environment. Buying regional and locally produced food is something that is important to me mainly because I think that it is less processed and less treated with pesticides or other substances, less time is required for transportation which is better for the quality/taste as it does not need to be conserved so much, etc. Also, I do not need much of a variation and I like the food that I know from the surroundings where I live and grew up; and I am fine with this range. But again, I might miss certain pieces of information and knowledge and have a false perception of the “goodness” of buying regional food. But this is what I think based on what I know.

Environmentally sustainable food and purchasing is likely good for the environment. I try to buy food on farmers markets and the local food in supermarkets around me, I walk there, take my reusable cotton bag, etc., which I think also helps the environment. A key person who “woke me up” when it comes to food was my daughter, about a year ago. She ate vegan for some time and now continues eating vegetarian and she cares very much about what she eats and its environmental and ethical impacts. She influenced me through her thoughts a lot and made me aware of the exploitation and other problems related to the food I was consuming. I don’t have very much money, but I fundamentally changed my practice and started to look much more aware and consciously at what is in media about food, what food is in the supermarket, where it comes from, what is in it, how it has been produced, etc., and I am much more selective on what I buy. And often, I also simply put back products that don’t agree with my values. The change in my thinking co-occurred or happened shortly after I had a relapse into sickness ca. one year ago, leaving me for months unable to move certain parts of my body, I could barely eat, and I had a serious depression as result of the physical issues. I am and will never get fully physically “healthy” again, but over the past year I shifted my thinking and went through something like a metamorphosis, and now I feel very satisfied and happy. This came along with my shift in prioritising another kind of eating for my wellbeing and happiness. The biggest obstacle in eating fully as I would like to is the price though, since some products which would be much better are much more expensive. As regards my upbringing and how it shaped me, I grew up on the countryside, where my grandmother had a vegetable and fruit garden. She incorporated me in taking care of it when I was a kid, and in this way, she educated me about what good food really looks like, what it tastes like, and to value such food. I am very thankful for this experience, which most kids nowadays probably do not have anymore. This upbringing continues to shape my attitude towards, and valuing of, food today.

Quotes

I don’t believe that it hurts the environment if it is in a balanced extent, or maybe I have too little information about this area still, but I don’t believe that it helps the environment or is very advantageous for the environment if one eats fully vegan.

I hear all of it, that one should avoid this and that, or that it would be advantageous for a better environment, but I have no pointed reports, I have no real information and hence no thoughts on what is better for the environment-

Keywords

Sickness, physical limitations/disability, lack of information, unknowledgeable, balanced eating, regional, social influence, child, affordability

RL6_DE06, Germany, Eating vegetarian with the hope to send signals to others and inspire behaviour change

Narrative

I am a 30-year-old pastry chef, married, no children. I grew up in a small village and now live in a medium-sized city. I aim for everything that I buy and eat to be organically (bio) produced and unpackaged. I therefore also do groceries mostly at bio-supermarkets, smaller food stores and the “unpackaged” store, but sometimes I also buy at the average, larger supermarkets. I eat vegetarian, which I started long time ago and not from one day to another, but it was a rather gradual process. When moving out of my parents’ house, I never started buying meat or so for myself and hence it gradually evolved. I have been eating vegan in several phases of my life, but I find it very difficult to do persistently. Also, I am a pastry chef and there it is very difficult to adhere to a fully vegan stance. In general though, I find it most important that I and we in general consume animal products in a conscious way, that is, that one knows what kind of food meat and animal products are, i.e., that it was/comes from a living being, and that one should be ready to pay some adequate price and look for organic versions of it. The most environmentally friendly diet is probably the one which involves foods that are as little processed as possible, as little as possible transported around, and as little as possible, if not at all, packaged. Hence even a vegan diet focused much on consuming highly processed foods may not be an ideal to strive for either.

Just like the transition to vegetarianism, the more general change of my diet was a gradual process. As a teenager I started eating health oriented, though I cannot pinpoint a specific factor that influenced me there. My mother focused on having fresh food at home, but not necessarily so much on seasonality, regional provision, etc., simply also because it was another time and thinking back then. During my apprenticeship as a confectioner/pastry chef, I saw the food waste and problematic ways of handling it, which left me thinking about it a lot. But the process was much fast-forwarded when I moved into a co-living flat, where we went together for groceries and went to the bio-supermarket, not the “conventional” stores. After I had left my parents’ home, I already had started buying more organic food but still was focusing on price (also because I still was in the

apprenticeship and did not earn much money); but going together with my flatmates helped me establish a new habit.

With eating environmentally friendly I think I do something better not only for myself and my body, but I also feel that I send signals to producers or kind of “vote” for the wish (and also need) to have only organic and non-packaged products on offer. My motivation to eat in the way I do is to support animal wellbeing, and to support farmers to receive better incomes for all the effort they have put into it. The greatest obstacle I faced and keep on facing in changing my food consumption is the access to sustainable food, since the amount and location of supermarkets providing such food is still more limited compared to other supermarkets. And also within supermarkets, the range of organic, seasonal and regional food is still quite limited. Hence, if I need certain ingredients for a specific recipe, I still sometimes switch back to non-bio products. Also, the cost factor is important, though I am ready to spend quite much money for good food since I see it as the fuel that keeps my body running. Still, I understand people who do not, since they may just see the comparison between the high cost of an organic product and that what nearly the same but non-organic product costs. It would just be so much easier if all the products cost the same (higher) price, and people would probably also treat, i.e. value, food differently.

I find myself frequently in the moral divide between whether to choose to buy something organic that is packaged in plastic, or something unpackaged, and I have until today not found a solution since I dislike both options. Apart from changing my own diet, I try to make other people around me aware of the need to be more careful about food and food waste. For example, during my apprenticeship and at work I make the teachers and my bosses aware that it might be fine to use smaller portions when practicing recipes, and that it is better to produce less because otherwise we throw away lots of food. My partner also would be less attentive to many aspects without communication with me, I guess. In general, for changing diets and habits, I find it very important to communicate with others and to exchange experiences, sharing information that we found about food and healthy/ecological eating, helping each other, making each other aware of certain things, and educating each other.

Quotes

I find myself frequently in the divide between whether to buy something organic packaged in plastic or something unpackaged, and I have not found a solution until today since I dislike both options.

I didn't decide in one day that I would go vegetarian from today on. But when I moved out of my parents' house, I never actually bought meat for myself.

As little processed as possible, as little transported as possible, as little packaged as possible (...) I think that would actually be best for the environment.

Keywords



Vegetarian, food waste in production, social influence, spreading awareness, unpackaged, organic, healthy eating, prices, availability

RL6_DE07, Germany, Not much is happening politically, but I continue eating as I learned in my childhood

Narrative

I am 75 years old, and I live alone in an apartment in a house that I own outside the small city of Aalen, Germany. My two sons are renting apartments in the same house, but we don't see each other so often, we live our own lives. I hold a degree as translator and before my pension I worked as a translator in England, Ireland, and Germany. When it comes to deciding what food to buy and eat, it is important to me that it is as natural as possible and organic. For animal-based food, in addition it is very important to me that the animals have been able to move around freely (i.e., not locked up in tiny cages or stables). This is independent of the type of animal, and I do not buy any meat or animal products that do not fit into this scheme. I try to buy locally and regionally produced food, I grow some food myself, and I buy much of my food directly from farmers and farmers markets. But this does not mean that I never buy food from further away.

To some extent I understand the conception that eating fully vegan or vegetarian is good or better for the environment. I am also used from childhood to meat seldom, like about once a week, and hence it would be probably relatively easy for me to shift to a vegetarian diet. But I like meat quite much. Therefore, I prioritise buying meat that does not come from factory farming, but where the animals have lived appropriately to the species. Next to basing which food I buy on these criteria, I further try to produce as little waste as possible, which includes food and packaging. Yet, trying to reduce plastic packaging is super difficult, even if the wish is there. Many shops offer paper packaging now, but I'm unsure (or don't really believe) whether this is really better for the environment. Food waste is used for my compost, which I then use in my small garden in which I grow certain foods, e.g. tomatoes. After harvesting, I cook and conserve the food and can live off it until the next year basically. I also try to not buy processed foods, but instead buy fresh food which I then use for cooking meals from scratch.

There was no specific moment in which I had to decide to eat in an environmentally friendly way, I grew up like this and never stopped. We lived in a house with a large garden and my mother grew and produced basically all food, we had chicken, etc. I do not know a life with non-environmentally friendly eating, and I also don't want to live differently. My upbringing has certainly helped me maintain my habits and lifestyle; e.g., I've learned and internalised that one should never throw away food but make something

out of it. I should mention though that one point I've changed compared to what I'm used from my mother is the use of sugar and sweets. I have eliminated refined sugar from my diet because I feel better without it – when stopping to eat sugar, I had withdrawal symptoms at first, which highlights how problematic sugar is. What is generally also helpful for maintaining my food habits is the fact that my circle of friends is quite similar. In reverse, the labelling and information about what is in the products is often missing or not readable (especially for older people), which hinders the ambitions to make good choices. Looking at the societal level, I am gloomier. We have known for more than 50 years that the way in which we consume and live is unsustainable, but nothing really has happened. I cannot hear the empty talks of politicians anymore, which are not producing any or only minimal results. Take the example of organic farming – it is not really fundamentally expanding. Last year, I was so happy to see the Green Party coming into power, but yet again, nothing is put in practice. There are always crises and excuses for inaction, even if in fact also before the crises nothing happened. I will not be affected very much by the resulting problems in the future, but I am concerned for the young generations who will have to live with the consequences of our inaction. I see the limits of the individual to live ecological. Living in a rural area with a small garden, I can grow some food and work on reducing my impact. But people living in cities without gardens, or people who do not have the economic leeway, don't necessarily have those possibilities.

Quotes

My mother, she grew everything herself, we processed the apples, we had chicken, so this is how I grew up, I just cannot do it differently, that is, actually I also do not want to do it differently.

I find that when it comes to ecology and ecological food production much too little is happening and I don't think that one can say that we would all starve if we would all be getting only ecological products.

I try to avoid plastic but it is very, very difficult because there is just too much plastic everywhere. The wish is there but it is so incredibly difficult.

Keywords

Growing food, organic meat, upbringing, childhood experiences, disappointment, political disillusionment, food labels, processed food, packaging, social environment

RL6_DE08, Germany, Spanish living in Berlin who found her middle way balancing health and environmental issues

Narrative

I am 41 years, I was born in Spain and I have been living in Berlin now for about 12 years. I am married to a German man, we have no kids. I studied audio visual communications in Spain and I also did some courses on screen printing, but for the last few years I have been jobless, also for health reasons. On the side, however, I recently started a small video editing project.

I don't like cooking very much, so if I have to choose, I choose the dish that is easy and quick to prepare. What food I buy and eat is strongly influenced by the fact that I have several food intolerances, most notably gluten intolerance, and I don't eat meat. Both my husband and I do groceries. We both try to buy regionally produced food, but this is difficult in Germany because there are not so many vegetables and fruit produced locally. When I'm back home in Spain this is easier. Thus, in Germany I just try to buy products produced as closely as possible, which can also be the Netherlands or Italy. Whenever possible, we also buy organic food and we try to buy seasonal. Among other things, we have subscribed to receiving a weekly box of seasonal vegetables and fruit. Nonetheless, I also buy things out of their season; in Germany, the range and length of season are just so narrow compared to what I am used to from Spain.

When it comes to vegetarian/vegan diets, I have tried by gradually eliminating meat and fish and to eat fish only when being at the coast. However, in the last years I have gone back to eating a bit fish, because it is easier for me. If I find something (e.g., in restaurants) that is gluten free without fish, I choose that. But in general, I have opened up for eating fish for practicality reasons. Eating vegetarian including fish comes with the best balance between practicality and living up to what is my main reason for the dietary switch, which is animal well-being. I also try to generally consume animal products less, e.g. reducing cow milk. But with vegetarianism, I think I found a practicable and good "middle way" for myself.

From my perspective, eating "differently" is particularly important considering especially also the farmers and those who produce the food more widely. Recently there have been several movies in Spanish media and discussed in society, documenting the problematic conditions of production, the problems which come with low food prices for farmers, the exploitation of workers, etc. and the need to consume less from the massive, large-scale production, and more food produced at small-scale and locally. The discussions emphasise the need to have more respect towards the products and the work put into it. Hence, I think ecological food is the better choice for all, i.e., the producers, for myself, and for the environment. Moreover, through talking with others about the way in which I eat, it can help me to make others aware of things. Hence, by eating vegetarian, eating organic food, etc. I can act as a positive example, which can make others think

about it, get me into conversations with others about food and needs to change what we eat, etc.

I see how the climate is changing, so I have been thinking what is something that we can do, and changing what I eat seemed like one thing that I can contribute. My motivation to eat more environmentally friendly is also the hope that more people will do the same, and the more do it, the more it can have an effect. What encouraged and enabled my dietary changes was, when it comes to eating vegetarian, the move to Berlin. In parallel to the move, I read a book in which a person described how she changed her life in small, non-radical steps. So I thought, I can do the same, and started changing things in small steps, among them to start eating vegetarian. I am a person who likes routines and habits, and for example once I like something, I can eat that every day. Hence the most difficult and important step for me towards change is that of establishing a new habit. Once I have been successful at that, it is no problem anymore. Before the move, I always felt that becoming vegetarian was too big of a step. But moving seemed like a very good moment to change, since life is changing very much anyway and it is easier to add one more aspect of change to it. The idea from the book to take small but gradually increasing steps helped further.

The switch to focus more on buying organic, regional, etc. came gradually over the past years also thanks to my husband, who encouraged us to look more at what we buy and eat. But what helped me much at changing my habits eventually was probably also the mere need to do so for health reasons. In addition, when I had to start eating gluten free, I started looking at what is in the products. I realised what is in there and this encouraged me to be more considerate about ingredients. Before that, I didn't look at the lists of ingredients and also did not want to know really what is in the food.

- My Spanish roots are a bit contradictory to what I eat today, i.e., eating now meatless, and it is something my parents for example still do not really understand; the same when it comes to the fact that I think about what is in the food, how healthy is it, etc. At the same time, where I come from might also have encouraged or helped me to dare questioning the habits, norms, and be open to change food routines and habits.

Quotes

It is too much for my from practicality reasons, but I understand the reason behind it. But I have chosen a middle way for me and stayed there.

My motivation is the hope that more people will also do more.

Eating vegetarian, my goal was both doing it for myself and for being an example to others.

Keywords



Vegetarian, health, gluten free, social influence, habit change, Mediterranean diet, practicality, partner support, cultural culinary traditions

RL6_DE09, Germany, I need to eat meat once a week for my health

Narrative

I am 36 years old, I was born in Armenia, grew up in Spain, and I moved to Germany ten years ago. My husband is German, and we have two children. I studied tourism management and work now in Berlin at a company as partner manager. In Armenia, my family and upbringing were Christian, but I am not affiliated to any religion or belief nowadays, neither is my husband. When it comes to buying food, the most important to me is where the products come from. First preference is that it's origin is Germany, but if no option from there is available, it should preferably come from another European country. Generally, we consider quite extensively where the food comes from and which is the closest country of production we can buy a given product. We never buy precooked foods or so, and we try to buy organic as much as possible but are a bit sceptical about the labels, since not all is really "bio" even if labelled so. We also adjust our consumption to the seasons, though not always, since for example our kids also sometimes want things like bananas or other non-seasonal things. But we also try to talk with them about environmental issues, plus they also here and there hear about issues, watch documentaries about e.g. meat production, avocados, etc. and then talk with us about it.

I agree that for the environmental health it is important to have reduced meat and animal product intake, and we have also considerably reduced our consumption in the last years. We eat meat once a week and usually buy it at organic supermarkets. That is, it shall not just be labelled organic, but it shall truly be organic from a proper, trustable supermarket. Some organic labels still allow for the meat to come from mass farming. A fully vegetarian diet has not worked for us. Among other things, because my iron levels are very low and if I do not eat meat in several weeks, my levels of iron reach critical lows. This was a major issue especially during my pregnancy. I was born in Armenia and I grew up in Spain. In both Armenia and Spain, diets are very rich in vegetables and fruits, but also in meat. Hence, I have been wondering whether the fact that I always used to eat much meat might be a reason for why my iron seems to react so sensitively to not eating meat. I tried to supplement iron through Kräuterblut and other things, but these supplements caused problems to my digestion. In the end, I found that eating meat once a week is a perfect balance for my health, while still not eating meat very extensively. We also have a subscription for a fruit and vegetables box, where we receive once a week a box full of seasonal, organic fruits and vegetables from farmers in our surroundings. My motivation to eat environmentally friendly is to contribute to a more sustainable handling of

the environment, to not harm the environment, to contribute to ensuring a good quality of the air we breathe, of the food we eat and thus lands in our bodies, of the water around us. It is all connected in a circle, and the planet Earth is our home. If we do not take better care of our home, we will at some point not be able to inhabit it anymore.

The point at which I started becoming aware of environmental issues in relation to food, and the possibility to eat environmentally friendly was when I moved to Germany and learned about the existence of bio-supermarkets and the like. At the beginning, I could not afford it at all times, but once I and also my husband started to have better incomes, we could change our consumption habits. I must also say that if I was a single mother, I could not afford buying the food as I do. My husband could, because he earns more than I do; but I could not afford it without him. What helped me at changing my behaviour was living in Berlin and having people around me doing it too, the society and social environment which does the same. In addition, having kids and feeling the wish to make sure that they can grow up and live in a liveable place spurs my motivation and persistency at eating in the way we do now. My cultural heritage furthermore has helped me know about the variety of vegetables, legumes and other vegetarian foods that we could integrate into our diet to make it vegetarian, and the array of ways in which spices can be used to add additional variety and tastiness. In contrast, looking at society in general, barriers to consuming environmentally friendly that I perceive are lack of information and the lack of values. That is, if we visit for example our parents, we see that they have the information and money, but they do not see the need, that is, they don't have the respective values to eat environmentally friendly.

Quotes

As soon as I stop eating meat for a few weeks, the iron levels drop completely and then I have to take supplements or eat meat again for a week.

I pay attention to the meat I buy, and I buy it in the organic market, in the real organic market, not in the discounter where the meat is labelled organic; we don't really trust how the organic meat sold there is produced, whether it is still mass-produced.

We have children and we also want our children to have children and that life on earth goes on.

Keywords

Meat eating, female health, Mediterranean diet, organic, regional, childhood experiences, food labels, affordability, values, partner support, social environment, cultural culinary traditions

RL6_DE10, Germany, Indian mother missing non-politically tainted information about how food habits can be environmentally sustainable

Narrative

I am a 33-year-old mother of two children, and I am married; my husband and I both come from India and ten years ago we moved to a small town in southern Germany. I am currently working part-time (25%) while at the same time doing my master's degree at the pedagogical university of applied sciences. Growing up in India, my husband and I were just like our families eating fully vegetarian diets. However, around the time of moving to Germany, we started eating meat, though we do not cook it too much (but the kids eat e.g. meat at their school canteens). We usually cook about twice a week, meals containing meat, mainly chicken or lamb, but also beef is not forbidden in our small family, despite our Hindu religious background. In general, all our warm meals are Indian, though in the recent years, with summers getting hotter and hotter, we have started to prepare some other meals. It has just become much too hot to eat our warm and hot Indian meals. I buy some food at the local supermarkets, trying to buy as much as possible from local producers (i.e., directly from our town and immediate surroundings), but I also buy many of our ingredients at Asian and Turkish supermarkets, where basically all is imported. Milk is something we usually buy directly at a farm; some of the spices that we need for the meals we tend to grate ourselves.

My kids like eating meat, I like it too, and I honestly also think my kids should eat some meat for the protein intake, as my son for example plays football and needs strength. Thinking about environmentally sustainable diets, I honestly don't know what it would look like, I have also not very much dealt with the question, and the pieces of information I have read and heard about it often are contradictory or seem to be biased towards the political agenda of those people saying so, so I don't really trust it. I have heard many things (e.g., chickens being treated with hormones to become fatter) and I am aware of things like the many misleading claims and information on packages and in advertisements provided about products. Also, from my family and neighbours in India I know about how they grow and harvest food and that these tended to be in harmony with the environment, like my father harvesting every two years other kinds of crops so the soil stays healthy. However, I feel a bit too naïve to mention any kind of opinion. I can mention though that, just as we learnt it when growing up in India, we have very little food waste since we tend to really use everything of the products, e.g., all parts of the vegetables. We also tried to start doing an own compost of the remaining food waste, but since we have no garden where we could further use it, we stopped it.

A motivation to engage more with environmentally and generally sustainable food and habits in general would be the possibility to ensure that my children can still live on this planet in a few years. But I miss some clearly neutral, fact-based information about what food and diets would be environmentally sustainable. There might be some outlets to

access that, but they tend to be expensive science magazines which I cannot afford. I tend to have to rely on freely accessible newspapers and internet websites; there is also a magazine from our health insurance company which I trust and tend to read (they also provide recipes that I like to cook sometimes). Moreover, I have certain habits that are find really hard to change, like eating our Indian dishes (which implies that we have to buy imported, non-local ingredients), or I am not used to German winter and find it hard to take the bike also in winter. I also have to say that I don't think very much about what kind of products we are consuming, what is in the products. In some cases I am well aware that the presentation of products and advertisements for products are misleading and promising something healthy, which is not truly the case. But even if I then try not to buy these products, the advertisements or product presentations influence my kids and then they want to eat it. Similarly, I often tell myself in those situations that buying it once is not such a big issue, hence ending yet buying such products despite the initial intention not to do so.

Quotes

Habits when one lives in another country (than the home country), are difficult to shift (...) and I don't know how I can change"; "You think 'yes, if you buy it once it's not so bad', (...) you do it anyway.

At home we usually cook vegetarian food, because I know how to prepare it.

Keywords

Politically biased information, Indian, vegetarianism, imported food, affordability, religion, cultural culinary traditions, upbringing, lack of information, misleading information, advertisement, food labels, processed foods

RL6_GR01, Greece, Veganism in a family of meat-eaters.

Narrative

I am a 22-year-old woman, I live in Thessaloniki Greece with my family, and I am a student. As far as my diet is concerned, I was for quite some time a vegetarian. I didn't eat meat, not only because there is too much consumption of animals. I just grew up in a

butcher family, so we ate meat 7 times a week. We were still eating our greens but they would put a piece of beef next to it. It was too much and when I was in my last year of high school it started to smell too much. I couldn't eat it, so then I spent about a year or so that I didn't eat it at all. I ate meat, eggs, and fish rarely. I was trying to replace meat with protein in other products. A lot of chickpeas, legumes, soybeans, and lentils, generally have iron inside to replace them. But it didn't go very well. I did tests and found the numbers were too low. Especially iron was very low and all the doctors we went to, attributed it that I did not eat meat for a year, that my body can not be 100% healthy and it is not enough to get my iron and protein from soy or lentils. I should eat countless amounts of soy or lentils so I had to eat meat again. In general, I don't try new things or new flavours, it's just some specific foods that I feel very good in both my taste buds and my stomach. I try to be as healthy as possible for myself and the environment. I had gone through a huge phase where I wasn't getting anything that wasn't organic, but it was a bit expensive. It was expensive to eat vegan and organic. I have enough money to be able to have a very balanced diet that I feel I am doing good to the environment and myself at the same time. There are enough expenses. However, it was at a stage in my life that I could give the money and I chose to give the money for organic products over something else. To tell you the truth I had seen a documentary on Netflix now I don't remember which one exactly. It went viral 2-3 years ago, which showed how much chemicals go into fruits and vegetables today. When I went to Crete to a village and ate a tomato from the vine of a friend's grandfather who did not put anything in it, I could tell the tomato was not artificial, it was green. I had never eaten a tastier thing, and he just cut it right there and gave it to me, no one had washed it because there was nothing on it. They don't sprinkle anything. I was shocked at how delicious and how the taste has been an organically grown product from one that has over that is processed has been sprayed. And because I generally like food very much and I like to enjoy what I eat, that is, I do not eat to say that I ate, I got strength and I leave eating because I want to feel it when I eat, I chose to start it so that I get as much as I can organically to feel more and the taste. And also all these chemicals. There are too many mutations in both products and health. That is, in the documentary they said that all these chemicals can cause diseases. To get autoimmune diseases that they didn't have. I don't know if this is true now, but it says that a chemical can cause you something that might not have been caused if you didn't take it. I was worried because if I can avoid even this, I will. Not to create additional problems for me. General obstacles in addition to the finances were also a matter of health that came after I did not eat meat that we went to take tests because I felt too tired. I felt like I couldn't do things I used to do. And because in general, I am a volunteer blood donor, I had gone to give platelets not even blood and no blood could come out and they tested me. I had 2 ferritin, the lowest is supposed to be 12, and they told me I should get an IV. My family were butchers so them finding out I am vegan is like going to tell them I was stealing. We were at the tables on Tsiknopempti and they were giving me meat and I was secretly feeding them to the dog under the table to make it look like I was eating it and all that instead of telling you I don't want to. My grandfather, who was a butcher, had in mind that if you are sick you have to eat meat to get well and if you don't eat meat you are sick. Meat is the solution to all this. I have idiopathic tremor, which is a neurological problem I have had since I was 8 years old, the whole family knows. My grandmother is convinced that it is because I do not feed properly. I've been to doctors since I was 8. I've been to the doctor and I've asked him if my diet plays a role and he told me that they are completely different things, and no

matter how many times you explain it to her, she doesn't accept it. This is what I say in front of them I will eat meat and all that, the rest of my life personal or when I leave the house and I do not have such common contact with them and I make my life again I intend not to feed so often, but not to the point again not to eat at all. So twice a week once a week, once? More definitely not, my body feels wrong after. These were the main factors the economic factor health, and family. I also saw the exams and I saw that they limited me too much in some things that I wanted to do. Let's say I had low ferritin, one thing that made me happy is giving blood. From a young age I wanted to be a donor because they are both my parents and my brother. I have to give too because I know I'm helping cancer patients in my family. When I was banned and told that for a year or two I can't give it made me sad. Women are more at risk because we have menstruation too. So they told me that about a year or two for my organism to come back to normal then I can give it. I haven't done it yet because my exams aren't good still. But it's for another reason at this time. Now I eat enough meat. Because me and my grandmother are together all summer, so you understand there was no choice. I have found many things that helped me to learn better about some things that interest me and to avoid some things that I would like to avoid. I met a girl at school, who was engaged in a more sustainable lifestyle and in general not only with the issues of nutrition. I want to support the planet but that kind of lifestyle is expensive. I live with my family, but I still have to work. If I can help at the supermarket I will help. It's about being able to afford it. When I go to the market and purchase something more sustainable and better for me and the environment, but it's not good for my pocket and it's a very important factor. I also found a lot of things online, which I liked very much because I had tried many recipes without meat and they seemed incredibly delicious to me. Delicious stuff. So that's how I started, so I had help. It wasn't like I started this journey alone. I had help. I also had help from a nutritionist. I didn't go many times. I had gone 1 2 times to tell which foods to take the vitamins I need and which foods to avoid because I also have an issue with my stomach, so it was an obstacle for not being able to eat everything. So I had the nutritionist. I had these pages on Instagram and YouTube that seemed incredibly helpful to me and had a lot of views. So I saw that a lot of people are looking and are interested in the most organic way of life today. That made me, even more, want to deal with it because let's tell the truth, most people work according to the mass. It would be good if there was a little more information from the media. On television I don't think they talk too much about it, nor about organic nutrition and organic, nor about the eco-friendly lifestyle which is very important, especially today. For me, the internet is number 1. TV is number 2 because the new generation works with the internet. The old generation doesn't work with the internet. The point is to keep them both informed because while you're still on the planet, you have to help. I think there could be more information in schools, especially because you learn the truth from a young age. Something that happened to me in my school and I liked is that when I was in elementary school every month they sent us a box with organic products inside. They were 100% organic and they did it essentially to show us what's organic and what's not. I just think they could do so much more. I think the children of today, are the salvation of tomorrow. So if you don't start with the kids and teach them some things, it's not going to change anything. Because the more you learn from a child some things, the easier it is if you do not agree in the future. Generally in both families and on my father's side and my mother's side we had gardens at home, in my villages. So I had, let's say, a contact, a contact with the organic products from my family, both of

them. However, because we have this whole mentality with meat in part yes they transferred it to me in part it was also my reaction. I don't know if it was to go against them for anything or because we have different opinions.

Quotes

I just grew up in a butcher family, so we ate meat seven times a week.

I had gone through a huge phase where I wasn't getting anything that wasn't organic, but it was a bit expensive.

General obstacles in addition to the finances were also a matter of health that came after I did not eat meat that we went to take tests because I felt too tired.

It wasn't like I started this journey alone, I had help.

Keywords

Vegan and organic products, low iron, butcher family, gardens, blood donor, documentary

RL6_GR02, Greece, Veganism and lack of social acceptance.

Narrative

I am a 25-year-old woman, a vegan, a student and I live in the student dorms and sometimes in my home with my family. I was a vegan for seven years. Then I quit for a while. I stopped because I was doing sports and I wanted more protein but now I'm back. So I did this morally mainly because I love animals very much and so through social media I learned about this movement, I saw that it fits with my views and I thought that it is not enough for me just to support it in my mind I want to do it too. It's something that I started to feel disturbed by the thought that animals are being tortured, not being treated properly, etc. It also definitely helped my identity because I was also young, 14-15 years old, when I started, so I think it was a part that made me feel like I found a part of myself somehow that I belong somewhere. In general I've always been like that and a little bit more towards alternative people and it's something that's a trait that tends to be more towards the alternative scene. And one reason I decided to start again I think is this part

because I always felt that it was a big part of my identity and the years I ate meat whenever I thought about it kind of hurt me that I have left this part that is very mine and I don't do it anymore. I kind of felt a little bit like pretending and I believe it. I mean, I felt a little weird, so I decided to try it again. For several years I did not know another person. Later, of course, I met, and my little sister, as soon as she came of age. When I was younger I was fencing. It's generally not that it was such a hindrance physically that if I wasn't putting on muscle and stuff like that, just when you're in a group and you're collectively doing some things, it starts to get a little tiresome to always think they will judge you. I had to eat something else or my coach would tell me I have to eat some meat. Or because in Greece it is still a bit taboo to have people even friendly or for fun, to laugh at you eat a little. It's a little bit tedious I think or a little weird. Generally because fencing is mainly an adult sport, we had older people who especially to them seemed very strange and very stupid and I experienced this pressure and teasing and all that. They thought it was stupid. Especially older people consider it completely necessary, for human health. It may be because let's say in fencing, however we do it is a little more is a more decent sport. The people who are there seem more average. Anyway, yeah, and maybe I'd be a little like a fly in milk. But yes, let's say we had people in the group who went hunting as a hobby, so it seemed to them too weird outrageous to go to a tavern and you wouldn't get anything to eat. It would be a little bit pressing. Especially for me, I never was, the person who would go to a table and start talking about vegetarianism or tell the other person "how you eat this don't eat it yuck it stinks to me" this and such I never did this thing ever. It was kind of tiring. It was annoying that I didn't bother anyone, but I was being commented on this thing. This time if I go on a trip abroad and there is something very interesting that has meat, I will not tell myself do not eat it. If I want to try it I will try but that only you on some such rare occasions. I don't think all people should become vegetarians. But to look at the materials to be organic or, for example, to be free-range, whatever we choose to show a respect for the environment and for the animals that live in it. A gradual stop to this exploitation of the earth, because we are destroying the planet ourselves and at some point it will not be able to get back on its own. It's important. It's something I think everyone should be interested in. To feel okay with the moral part in me, not to feel remorse, not to have bad thoughts when it comes to eating. As for the destruction of the environment and the exploitation of animals, the torture of animals basically, because I can understand that we have to kill an animal to eat it, but what happens in big industries is not just killing an animal it is torture. They have them locked up in places where I feel like it's day all the time, e.g. to keep laying eggs or whatever. In my family, I can't say that I had great difficulties. In the beginning, maybe it was because I was young. My mom had to change what she's cooking, but it's just the two of us at home, so it's not like we're five people and we're all going to be killed for what we're going to eat, and she didn't mind because she's also a nurse and she can understand that even if you don't have to eat meat every day. So I didn't have that kind of problems. Now, in the old days, when I went to high school, the difficulties were mainly if you go out to eat with friends, because there were not many options. On holidays we usually ate in taverns there was not many choices. Now that has changed a lot. But yes, this was mainly that you would go to a tavern, eat potatoes and tzatziki only. Generally I think most people if you go and tell them you're a bit over-the-top or be careful where you buy it and what you buy, first he gets angry and responds negatively and then either he won't think about it or he can think about it later. But also generally as people as a whole I think most people prefer

to keep doing what they like and let it be harmful for anything. It's much easier to go buy whatever is the most delicious and let it suck or whatever. I also think there is not enough information on this issue, so people can not understand how frequent it is and also that it is not so difficult in fact that they have in mind that you only eat salads, nothing else. That's not the case here. Apart from there being more options out in the shops that someone goes to eat, which is done slowly fortunately, I think somehow, even in school, when kids learn about nutrition and eating habits and what's healthy and what's not, these identities should be discussed a little bit, that they exist, that people survive and live normally. Now, I now that I do this due to the realisation just that this person I want to be throughout life. Sometimes I think what person I want to be what person I want others to know in the future, my family, etc. A piece, let's say, that interests me as a human being. I'm interested in trying to be a good person and I feel like that for me is directly connected to feeling like I'm a good person. I'm in Fine Arts, so I've met a lot more people who believe the same thing and do it and a lot of people in my school especially. Most may be vegetarians. from a part of upbringing and where he grew up, etc., it is not something that would be usual or something that I think would help me there. Just maybe the part that from a young age I felt the need to differentiate myself a little from my family and from my surroundings because we did not have good relations. I think I've done very different things than you'd expect based on how I've grown up and the people I've had around me.

Quotes

It's something that I started to feel disturbed by the thought that animals are being tortured, not being treated properly.

It also definitely helped my identity because I was also a little 14-15 when I started, so I think it was a part that made me feel like I found a part of myself somehow that I belong somewhere.

Or because in Greece it is still a bit taboo to have people even friendly or for fun, to laugh at you eat a little.

Keywords

Veganism, adolescence, judging, animal abuse, sport, identity



RL6_GR03, Greece, An agronomist's perspective on sustainable diet and food production.

Narrative

I'm 74 years old, an agronomist, and I've been teaching food technology for 15 years. I'm against ready-made food because all ready-made food has additives, has flavour enhancers, aroma, appearance, everything. I consider prostheses to be a cause of cancer. As an agronomist, I know. What does cancer mean? unjustified increase in the size or number of cells. When I put additives in my food, I create conditions, a favourable environment for growth. From then on I try not to eat ready-made food unless I go to the tavern and the restaurant I will eat, but at home the casserole works. I'm trying to diet. I do fasting that few do fasting today. Fasting of course also affects that I will eat very specific foods and usually fasting is also foods that are organic and have fewer calories. I have a principle that I learned from the University. Whatever you get you have to return. That is, the Earth is not inexhaustible. To put a little fertiliser I consider it organic, regardless of the fact that I do not put an excessive amount. And besides, organic matter has no nitrogen, which is the main nitrogen in the plant is like bread in man. A man can live without bread, no matter how much he does not want to eat. This is nitrogen. I always put a little in all my crops. Why? To keep this in mind always, whatever you take from the earth you must return. This is sustainable development. All right, we can't just return everything, but what we can do as much as we can. I tell you, I think a lot of what they are peddling us with is exaggeration. the cow population in the Netherlands, Metsovo, is declining. So far we have been lacking protein. But the sufficiency in protein gave another development to all mankind. I don't overeat, but I don't end up vegetarianism either. By no means. And protein I eat and both animal and vegetable. It is not possible to substitute animal protein, to limit consumption I understand it. I think it's too much. And then to reduce animal protein, it can be reduced by eating more cheese, eggs. There are alternatives. Or let the fish in. You see that as long as there is demand, its price increases. Everyone wants to eat fish, but not many can eat it. The only difficulty is that there is no sufficiency for the whole year in consumption. I'm telling you now I can't not buy green beans. Let's say I can't grow potatoes on 50 sq. I try to eat seasonally. But it's not easy to convince my wife and family not to eat green beans at Christmas or tomato all winter, autumn and spring. Most of the food we buy. Okra for example I do not like okra, but they are very beneficial, they help a lot in defecation. I With Vegetables, by eating vegetables, I fought constipation, and even leafy vegetables, celery, the ones that have fibre. This is how constipation is fought. My parents were farmers so we grew up in it. We didn't work professionally, but we helped. And I was always in touch with nature. Let me tell you, I only lived in an apartment for as long as I was a student. Then I lived only in a detached house. And elsewhere I lived in Alexandria. I did not go to a building, I was lucky because my house is two-storey, it is not a building. I never wanted to, when I lived the student years in the apartment and I never liked it. I loved nature outside, being outside. Maybe

that's one reason I became an agronomist. I could not live confined. So I have lost all idea about all politicians, not politics, politicians, because they do the opposite of what they advise us. The urbanization came, they told us decentralization will do decentralization and they did urbanization. But since I told you the politicians called decentralization, all generally without party and partisan. They do what they want. We sit under the TV. Biologically, when you look at it, there's nothing worse. The organism that is neutered never matures. She remains in the stage of puberty. There is global migration to major urban centres from China to the West everywhere. Everywhere around the world. How did they become cities with 25 and 40 and 30 million people? where will these people go? How will they go back? what will they feed on? until now we were in favour of organic farming. Organic farming does not give us food. Until a few years ago, the cultivation of genetically modified plants in Europe was banned. Now that's all we eat and they don't tell us. They don't say they're hybrids. I am trying to understand personally how we have so many imports of fruits, vegetables, imports from foreign countries. And not being able to have in Greece that has very fertile soil to be able to cover the production for Greece that is. That's what I'm trying to figure out. It is the policy of all governments from the beginning of the world. The Common Agricultural Policy has harmed Greece and the whole of Europe and the whole world. Europe does not produce food. He searches and finds food cheaply. In other words, we are getting sugar cheaper, but how many thousands of farmers are out of work. There is nothing Greek. Everything goes abroad. There's the Super Fund. But the primary sector in Greece is under persecution, especially in Greece. In Europe it is limited, but in a different way. In principle we were until 50-60 years ago were 30% of the population were farmers. How much is it today? no one knows. And you can't even help yourself. That's where the work goes. The primary sector is being hunted, it is being hunted both in Greece and in Europe, but especially in Greece. They don't want to work. In farming the same and in fishing the same. They burned the forests and the timber could not be dismantled and they put the wind turbines.

Quotes

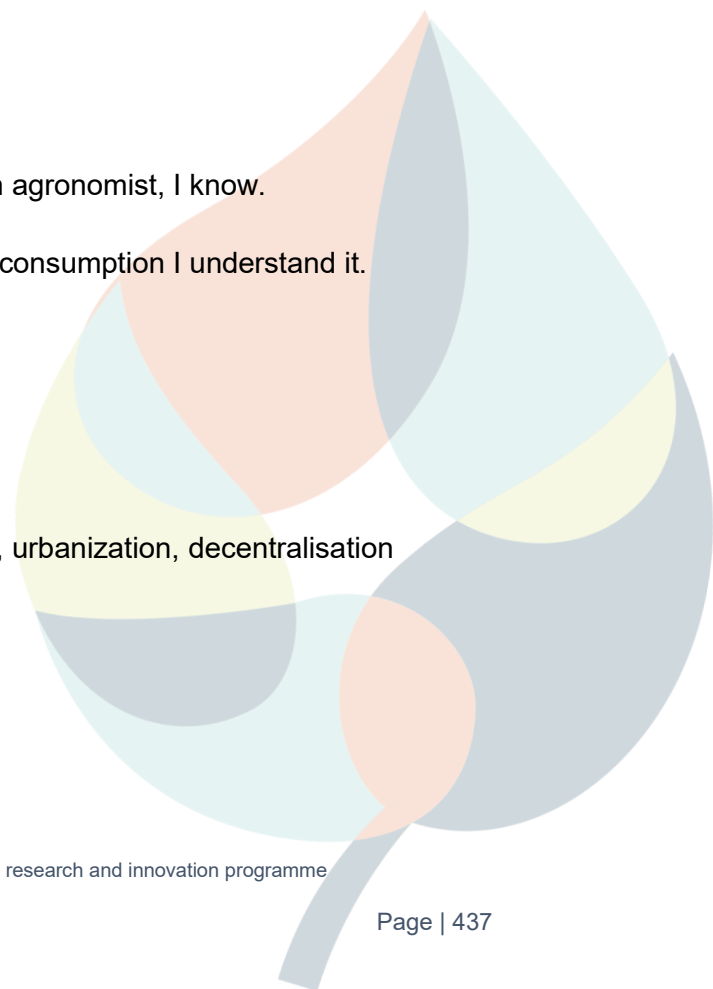
I consider prostheses to be a cause of cancer. As an agronomist, I know.

It is not possible to substitute animal protein, to limit consumption I understand it.

And I was always in touch with nature.

Keywords

Cancerous additives, organic crops, fasting, farming, urbanization, decentralisation



RL6_GR04, Greece, Sustainable eating as part of someone's identity driven by moral values

Narrative

I am a 23-year-old woman. I am from Corinth and I live in Thessaloniki, I just finished my Veterinary school. For about two years now I have been a vegetarian, so I don't eat meat, that is, I eat anything except meat. I also eat fish and this actually started with me because I had researched a little more about the effect the meat industry had on the environment and that influenced me morally. So, from then on I took it gradually and limited those foods, but I also tried to find ways to eat better and in terms of the environment. I will definitely say that the department I was studying also played a role because I had encountered a more animal friendly mentality.

Another influence that made me eat in a more sustainable way exposure to information from documentaries regarding the state of the environment and the immediate need for all of us to change our eating habits and protect the environment as we are running out of time and environmental resources. We are not doing well as humanity and we don't have much time remaining we have regarding the destruction of the environment is imminent as our resources are finite and they are running out. I had been involved a bit more and so then I realised what was really going on in the industry and what effects it has on the environment. And all of this kind of combined and I also had influences from friends and such and that definitely helped. My friends also played a role as I saw, in practice What it is like not to eat meat, because other students had also stop eating it. That is, my two friends from school did not eat meat so I saw that ok it's not that hard after all it's not a terrible thing not to eat meat and so little by little I started gradually and then as time went by I limited it more until I stopped. So I was also influenced from my friends. It is also a contribution to feeling better about yourself in that you are trying to do something about it. But it is also the moral part in terms of animals, that is, those that come out of meat industries. I don't agree at all. So I can't support eating meat. It also makes me feel like part of a community as it gives me a certain identity. However there are many obstacles regarding adopting a vegan diet . For instance We were together at a panhellenic veterinary conference and during the break he had a lunch break. you would expect it to have many options for many people who eat sustainably and it was almost all meat so it had meat pizzas, sausage, pies. I don't know, it was all meat and only had a very small selection for someone who doesn't eat meat. And if you think that it is a big panhellenic conference in the veterinary field you would expect options regarding food. And we are in 2022 and in Greece so you see that they don't really think about people who eat sustainably. Which is something of importance regarding access to sustainable food. Another obstacle was from my dad who's more traditional and doesn't really understand the concept of sustainable eating. And the same was from my grandfather, and grandmother. My mother and sister were definitely more accepting. But this also causes issues with access because they would be cooking chicken for instance and they

would ask me whether I would like to eat a portion. So they keep asking me even though I haven't eaten meat in 2 years. On the other hand some factors that helped me with access to food are social media and YouTube as you can get information through that. For instance you can now see more chefs offering vegan recipes so now you see a recipe for pastitsio (Greek dish traditionally using minced meat as an ingredient) , that does not include meat so now you have an extra choice. Also access to sustainable food is becoming better in super markets. A few years back only one super market would carry vegan chicken fingers and now you see almost every supermarket carrying that. So now I have access to vegan alternatives that I can replace meat with and I don't even miss the taste of meat. Regarding food waste we try to keep food as much as we can but we throw away left overs if they are left for a long time. I would be open to deal with food waste in a different manner but I don't have any information regarding how to deal with that.

Quotes

That is, in terms of environmental destruction, in the end we will not have resources.

Another influence that made me eat in a more sustainable way exposure to information from documentaries regarding the state of the environment and the immediate need for all of us to change our eating habits and protect the environment.

Keywords

Vegetarian, identity, moral values, friend, activism

RL6_GR05, Greece, Exposure to animal meat farms as the starting point for change

Narrative

I am a 22-year-old medicine student and I live in Thessaloniki, Greece. I became a vegan 2 years ago. The main thing that motivated me to look up things about this, was a friend of mine who is studying veterinary medicine and when she talked to me about how she started going to the chicken farms and in all of these structures of the production animal products, I understood the breeding conditions of animals, so I was kind of shocked because I wasn't aware of it at all. Firstly, about the way they are raised and secondly how harmful these products can be in some cases, so I got emotional about how an animal is

tortured. And I was also thinking about the part of what I'm eating if I continue to eat meat and if it's healthy for me." My reason for cutting out meat was mostly emotional. It wasn't so much about the environment as we say. It was mainly because I had in mind an animal in pain, so it wasn't about the environment and the dioxide and all that stuff they say". The first one about finding and replacing some foods that should eventually be included in my diet to replenish iron with legumes, lentils, etc. Regarding challenges, first one was how I would express it (change to veganism) and I will communicate it, first with my own people to tell my parents and let them understand that I want to stop eating meat. It was a problem. I mean, at first they couldn't understand it. They made me food with meat and told me come, try it, while I didn't want to try it. Another problem is that I had to sit down and learn and look up recipes to cook lentils and cook lentils in a way that I will like so that I can eat them twice a week and not once or two times per week as it used to be before. Also in the beginning I didn't want to communicate it. It wasn't exactly that I was ashamed, I wasn't and I'm not at all ashamed of it. It was more rather in the context of making it my own within myself first, so that then I would have the freedom and comfort to -whatever the other person tells me, not take it personally and let it affect me. The main information I get about food and accessibility apart from my friends is from the internet. For instance let's say an internet page, which makes purely vegetarian recipes and describes a complete meal from all sides and not just a tasty meal which can be fattening. So yes, that was definitely a source and then YouTube channels from abroad Greece. In terms of finding what suits me nutritionally, in recipes, etc. it was mainly on the internet, let's say blogs, like Madame Ginger's or on YouTube recipes from foreigners who have a channel that is very specific. Regarding ways forward to inform people I think doctors could certainly open a discussion and nutritionists, possibly a discussion with their patients regarding the nutritional part which unfortunately at the moment is not happening at all. I mean, I don't know if there are specialised nutritionists who deal with this kind of sustainable diet, but let's say for doctors, I know from my little experience that no one does, and I've even seen very negative attitudes from doctors.

For example in the hospital I remember a girl who had iron deficiency anaemia and the reason was not eating meat. The physicians were very negative. They told her to start eating meat and to not do stupid things like that. I mean, I've had and still have conversations with people who are very fanatical against vegetarianism, no matter what you say to them.

Anyway, you know, it's not worth going into the process of convincing someone. I also had this happen with my dermatologist because I was taking pills for acne and I had mentioned it to her just to let her know and she told me not to do this kind of nutrition and that her husband had started it and he was feeling very weak in his legs so I think that as trivial as it sounds it would play a big role to have health professionals be more informed and supporting. Health professionals should obviously first raise awareness through conferences and what can be done, so that they can then raise awareness among patients as well. Now regarding food leftovers it is thrown away. I'm not doing anything about that. A few months ago I tried to keep vegetable or mushroom leftovers in the freezer to make broth later. But this didn't suit me at all. I mean, I did it a couple of times, but it didn't suit me at all. So at this stage, the food will either be consumed or if there is something left and spoils or is not eaten and it seems like days have passed, it is thrown away.

Quotes

In the hospital I remember a girl who had iron deficiency anaemia and the reason was not eating meat. The physicians were very negative.

My reason for cutting out meat was mostly emotional. It wasn't so much about the environment as we say.

Keywords

Veganism, moral values, animal suffering, friends, unsupportive doctors

RL6_GR06, Greece, A marginalised man whose life is transformed through organic farming

Narrative

I am a 40-year-old man from Toumba, Thessaloniki. I got in touch with organic vegetable gardening when I was in prison, I started there and I like it very much. During my time in prison I learn how to be in contact with the Earth, and so when I got out, I found a little piece of land in Karatasou (Stavropouli) and I rented it, because it was very affordable and with little money you had access to water and tools. I like it very much although I did not know anything before about farming and vegetable gardening.

It was really nice to bring home the organic vegetables, and I used to grow bigger quantities and the surplus I share it with people around me. The piece of land was small but produced enough for two or three people. For me to work with the land is also a kind of psychotherapy, it fills my time in a beautiful way. The taste is also very important, one you get used to eat organic vegetables, you cannot eat non-organic ones, which do not taste the same. There is a big difference in taste between organic and non-organically grown vegetables. And it is also better for your health. This is also an important reason to eat organically grown vegetables. At some point they informed that they created a social cooperative of organic farming in the land of the psychiatric hospital, and I decided to join because I believed in the initiative, and this could happen because I had also the support from an NGO which helps children and youth in vulnerable conditions (ARSIS). ARSIS paid for my salary a year and a half, so that I could get going with the cooperative. The land where we grow the vegetables was always used for farming, it used to have always

greenhouses. For the social cooperative it is very important to produce organic vegetables, because I think it is healthier, and because the land was suitable, since pesticides have never been used in this land. I like very much that working with the land and growing organic vegetables is now my job. It is very important for me that the working environment is supportive. There is no boss, and everything is done with love and care. The ARGO (National Organism for Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Mental Health) community, to which I belonged to as well, has supported us community. So there are a lot of people from that community and beyond that buy organic vegetables to help us and support us. Other people they buy our organic vegetables because they prefer them and think is better for their health. The people that buy to support us, come and go. That is, they will buy one, two or more times but at some point they will stop, only some of those that have money stay as client. Those that they do not have money, even if they want to support us they struggle. A woman that buy our organic vegetable basket to support us, to try it, see money as an important factor since she is used to go to the local street markets where with 10 euros you can but a lot of vegetables and fruits. Money plays a very important role, I have many clients that they stopped buying organic vegetables because they could not afford it anymore. The people that buy our organic vegetable for health reasons, because they want to eat organic food, or do it for their children, they will buy on a regular basis. Luckily, organic is now a trend, and I see a difference with new generation parents who are now starting a family, they have a different mentality. For the cooperative money is also an issue, we are only 3 people, if we could have more people we could do much better. We face many problems, for instance often we have to face diseases that can kill all our production, and we do our best, but if we could have more people who have knowledge and can contribute with solutions and ideas, it would help a lot. My dream it to go and live in the village from where my girlfriend is, and be close to nature. I would have a vegetable garden in front of my house, in a village is easier to eat good and organic food, and live in a sustainable way, you get eggs from a friend etc. If I would have a basic stable salary of 700 euros, I would go right now to live to the village. If I would have a child, I would like to raise them in the village, where you can have better quality of life.

Quotes

I remember the first day, the little piece of earth was very hard. I worked for seven hours and it filled my soul. I started from this piece of land when I got out of prison.

I do it for me, for my mental health.

After it was difficult to go to grocery store or the street market, It was difficult, I did not like it. The taste it is very different. That is, if you learn to eat organic, the taste is something else.

Keywords

Behavioural change, organic vegetables, organic farming, mental health, taste, physical health



RL6_GR07, Greece, A man who suffered health issues from the use of pesticides and food chemicals

Narrative

I am a 69-year-old man living in Thessaloniki. I was born in a family of farmers, so I have been involved in farming from a young age. But I have always been involved in conventional, non-organic, farming of smoke, asparagus etc. In 2017 when I was finished with my drug rehabilitation program I was offered to get involved, and be responsible for organic farming in a social cooperative in Thessaloniki. The main reason I decided to work on organic farming and to eat only organic products that I produced in the social cooperative is health. When I worked in conventional farming I used to handle a lot of pesticides and chemicals, and in those times nobody took security measures in Greece, so I developed serious health issues such as cancer, which are in remission now, but I still have some health sensitivities, if I touch any pesticides or chemical I easily develop strong allergic reactions. So when I started working in the organic farming with the social cooperative I decided leave all those things behind and to make important changes in relation to food. I have also reduced meat and processed food consumption. After I started consuming only organic food I saw a positive impact on my health, my organism recovered. In the social cooperative we implement different innovative methods in organic farming, for instance I do solar heating soil-disinfection, I do not use any chemical or pesticide. That is, I cover the soil with transparent polyethylene so that with solar heat the temperature reaches 80 degrees and all the wild grass is burnt. I only use organic fertiliser and some biological substances that are allowed and harmless to health. As I said I was a farmer since a young age so I understand well the advantages of organic farming in relation to conventional farming. I have been a victim in the past of the influence of a perfect image that you can get with conventional farming, of a perfect pepper which looks very attractive and tasty. But this pepper is full of poison, and has to be eaten within 3 days. On the other hand, if you take an organic pepper you can just clean it and eat it, without the stress of thinking that my stomach is going to ache or that I going to have a health problem. My parents' generation did not have the knowledge and information, so I saw how my parents used chemical fertilisers thinking that it would made the vegetables better, nicer. The organic vegetables I produce are little, and are seasonal. I also leave the land to rest. That is, I will not over exploit the land, and do not use chemical fertiliser so that I can exploit more, I try to leave as little environmental print as I can. Money is an issue for the sustainability of the social cooperative, there are difficulties with the job all the time, and I am basically the only one who is responsible of the farming on a daily basis. Fortunately, there are volunteers, some of them come as part of the Erasmus program, and others that come and help but this is not enough. Money is an issue also for

the people to buy and eat organic farming products. One kilogram of potatoes from organic farming costs 1.20 euros, while you can get with 50 cents from conventional farming. So, this is an issue, people needs to fill in their shopping baskets. Organic farming is very expensive, because you have a smaller production relative to conventional farming, and it needs a lot of human work, to clean the land all the time from wild grass. For instance, a week ago, the land I am farming was full of wild grass, but luckily 5 young people came and helped me to clean it. It is also difficult to change habits, people have learned to eat conventional farming products, how they look and taste, so it takes some time to get use to organic farming products. But I think that once you get used to it, you realise that they have better taste and that they are safer for the health.

Quotes

Why organic? Because I have had health challenges and I saw that with organic products my organism recovered very fast.

I used to make a lot of sprays when I was a conventional farmer, a lot of poison, and then we were not careful at all. That caused me a lot of diseases.

I made other food changes with meat, that is, no fat, fish, chicken, no giros, no pizza...

Keywords

Health, taste, organic farming, money, family experiences

RL6_GR08, Greece, Rehabilitated father turns organic

Narrative

I am a 53-year-old-father of one and I work as an office staff and a delivery driver at Kethea Argo, a rehabilitation centre located inside the premises of the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki. I completed my rehabilitation program in Argo in 2016 and subsequently, I started looking for a job, during a very difficult time for Greece's economy. With the help of Argo's leader, we were given a small part of the land, inside the premises of the Psychiatric Hospital, which we could make use of in order to grow some organic vegetables. With the help of a rehabilitated agronomist, and other rehabilitated members

we started working with Biokofinaki, a company that distributes organic fruits and vegetables in Thessaloniki. We also received a donation from the Latsis foundation to purchase a refrigerated delivery truck.

As so, we count on “Mother Earth”, in order to provide food for our families and the families of our customers, who want to eat clean, organic products with no pesticides and chemicals on them. I will call them customers for easy of speech, but I consider them more people which we are connected to. It is also very important that our customers, support socially vulnerable groups, and in particular us, as drug rehabilitated individuals into having a decent job. We are very grateful for their trust and they had supported us a lot during the last couple of years, which we need to mention that were not at all easy for Greeks. Before that we were working as delivery drivers, but the conditions were horrible, so we decided to come and work for the people that supported us throughout our rehabilitation journey and helped us to stand in our feet. Now before my work here, I had no experience or knowledge in agriculture, but slowly I learned how to plant several vegetables. During the last spring I planted strawberries with my son which was something that I enjoyed very much. I also feel very satisfied and fortunate that my kid eats organic food in his everyday life. It has happened before for him to eat a carrot that was bought from the supermarket and he complained about the taste. I also enjoy very much the positive feedback that we get from our customers and the relationships that we have built with them. Especially when we get the chance to explain to their children the importance of what we do. We usually take part in events and we collaborate with programs from abroad. The taste is also a major factor. When I eat a tomato from the supermarket, it tastes like a sponge. When I eat from our fields here I know that it will be healthy and tasty. So I am a very lucky man, that I can secure some of our products for me and my family . It also has to do with the way I was brought up. I remember that the vegetables that I used to eat as a kid, in our village, were much purer than the ones that are available today. In general my choice to work here changed my life. I was 40 when I joined the rehabilitation program and I started working here at 47. Before all that I was a painter, but in my age and in the situation that Greece was at the time, nobody would hire me. Here, I have many perks, I love my job and I love working for people that have supported me. However, it is a very difficult job. The fieldwork that is required is very intensive, especially in the summer months. This is what I found the most difficult and I believe that this is a deterrent for many people who want to follow more “organic” practices. Especially for someone who is not used to this type of lifestyle.

Quotes

We count on “Mother Earth”, in order to provide food for our families and the families of our customers.

Before my work here, I had no experience or knowledge in agriculture.

I feel very satisfied and fortunate that my kid eats organic food in his everyday life.

When I eat a tomato from the supermarket, it tastes like a sponge.

Keywords

Drug rehabilitated, son, organic products, decent job, difficult job, change

RL6_GR09, Greece, Elderly woman with influences from childhood

Narrative

I am a 78-year-old widowed woman, I live in the area of Stavroupoli, in Thessaloniki, and I am a mother of two kids and a grandmother of 5 grandkids. I was born and raised in a very small village near the town of Drama with my mother and 6 brothers. Back then we used to eat what was available from our land and the land of our village. And I see the difference between then and now. Now everything comes from large crops or from greenhouses. For example, potatoes and onions. I remember that when I was a child the potatoes and the onions that we had in our fields were all of different sizes and shapes. Now, I go to the local market and I see that all the vegetables are uniform and shiny. But that is what the modern consumer that lives in the city wants. Or for example, the summer squash. I am trying to find the most deformed ones, as they are said to be the most authentic. The same goes for cucumbers and tomatoes. Now, all the cucumbers are straight like swords, because they grow them in specific ways in the greenhouses, but I remember that the cucumbers in my village used to be curved, as they touched the ground. So, I always try to buy these, when I can find them in the market. It is a matter of price too. For example, the same producer sells the tomatoes that come from the greenhouse at around 1.20€ and the ones that are from the field outside at 0.80€. This is because he plants them and then he leaves them to grow, without worrying about how many he will eventually get. So, I choose those as they are both cheaper but also healthier and cleaner. Because now, everything gets drizzled with pesticides. But unfortunately, the producer cannot have a large production without the use of pesticides. It is the only way. When my husband got sick with cancer, the first thing that the doctor asked him was whether he used to drizzle with pesticides on his plants. This was the very first thing that he asked him. So, I try to avoid pesticides. However, I do not believe that there are truly organic products in the market. When I hear sellers say that their products come from their own production, I know that they have large crops and that they use pesticides. For example, I hear customers in the market say "What a great and clean olive". But they have to know that there is not a single olive without a pesticide on it. The only seller that I trust is a guy from which I buy plums, and I know that he only has 5 trees and that he grows them himself. I mention the local market a lot as this is where I get most of the products, because there you get the chance to choose and compare prices, which

is very important for me. I also come from a family of butchers. My husband and his brother were both butchers. However, this has not influenced my eating habits a lot, as I always ate what I wanted. The truth is that I do not know how to cook modern dishes, like for example carbonara. This type of food has a lot of processed ingredients and it is also very heavy for me. I cook more traditionally. In addition, nowadays, I see that the majority of people are obese, while back in my years everybody was very slim and healthy. I saw a friend of mine the other day eating just bread, olives, and tomato for breakfast and it reminded me of my childhood. Now everybody eats butter and different kinds of toppings for breakfast. Marmalade for example. It is very important that I make marmalades and traditional sweets by myself. I never bought marmalade in my life, as all these items in the supermarkets have preservatives in them. I like making this kind of stuff on my own. The same goes for herbs and spices, like oregano, thyme, marjoram, chamomile, etc. I collect them and dry them myself. I have the time and desire to do that. Now I do not expect for a working mother to do the same, but for me not finding time is also sometimes an excuse. Now, of course, I will have to buy the stuff that I cannot make my own, like for example bread, which most of the time is of bad quality, but I do not have another choice as there is only one bakery close to my house. I also choose only seasonal fruits and vegetables from the market. There is no chance for me to eat cucumbers or tomatoes during the winter. I'll buy broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, carrot, and celery. And it is also a matter of taste. Try eating a tomato in the winter and you will see. I recall again my mother, who used to say that if the cabbage is not covered with hoar frost, then it will not taste good at all. And she was right.

Quotes

Now, everything gets drizzled with pesticides.

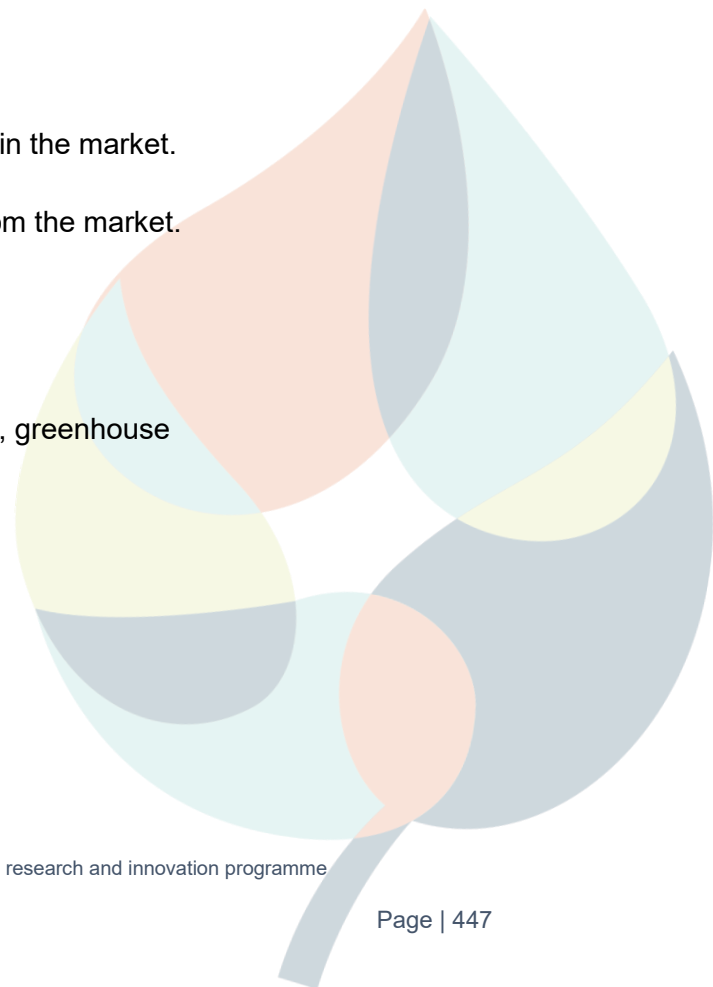
I try to avoid pesticides.

I do not believe that there are truly organic products in the market.

I also choose only seasonal fruits and vegetables from the market.

Keywords

Pesticides, childhood, husband, local market, village, greenhouse



RL6_GR10, Greece, The importance of knowledge in vegetarianism

Narrative

I am a 22-year-old student, I live in Peraia with my parents, and I have been a vegetarian for the last two years. I always had in my mind how wrongfully we are consuming food in general, maybe not specifically in Greece because I don't believe that Greece is one of the worst countries on that, but there is a lot of room for improvement. I started thinking about that when I was in high school, and I started considering becoming a vegetarian, because I think that especially in Greece, there is an overconsumption of meat. I remember that I was feeling very bad when I was processing the thought of all these animals being killed to be available on our plates. Especially during the holidays when we barbecued the whole animal it was a very cruel sight. And despite the ethical considerations, it is also the fact that due to overconsumption, the quality of what the livestock is fed with, concerns me. As this will eventually get back at my body if I eat it. The carbon emission from these large livestock farms is also a big problem for the environment, which is constantly burdened. At first, it was a bit difficult for me to make the decision to become a vegetarian, as I was not sure if I could make it. I was mainly concerned about how limited my options will be. For example, I like chicken a lot, and I did not believe that I would be able to stop eating it, but as it turned out it is all a matter of habit. So, then I started talking with other people and started watching some relevant documentaries. The cruel images that I saw in the documentaries, the opinions of specialized scientists and the results of studies that were presented in them, influenced me a lot to finally decide to make the step into vegetarianism. I had in my mind that I would do it for as long as my body could stand it, as it is very difficult in general. I just said to myself that if at any point I wanted to quit, I would add a very small amount of meat to my diet, nothing compared to what I used to eat all these years.

My mistake was that I cut eating meat instantly. This is not the right way to do it. However, this has not influenced me a lot. For the past two years, I have felt my body much healthier and "lighter". I'm trying to have a variety in my diet, regarding vegetables, legumes, and fruits, so that I get all the necessary vitamins because it is true that you no longer get some vitamins after cutting out the consumption of meat and fish. That's why it is good to visit a nutritionist, who can help you combine different sources of nutrients. Unfortunately, I myself have not paid a visit yet, but I should definitely do that. Another trap is that many people start gaining weight after becoming vegetarian due to the increase in carbs consumption. Of course, the fact that I am a vegetarian and not a vegan is a plus for me. People that are vegan have much fewer options than us, as we can eat eggs and dairy products. The thing with organic and local products is the fact that most of the time they are more expensive than conventional. This is why many people do not go to veganism and choose vegetarianism instead. For example, vegans should go to specific vegan restaurants which in general are more expensive than other restaurants. Another thing that somebody should be very careful about is the health issues that could arise from such diets. I am lucky that my body can stand it, as I regularly do check-ups

with blood tests etc. However, there are many vegans that do not follow a strict and complete diet, and so they end up using supplements. I was also very lucky that my family supported my choice. From the first moment, my mother started making two separate meals, one for me and one for the rest of my family. However as time went by she started making vegetarian meals for all the family, and this helped us limit the overall consumption of meat in our house. My friends were also very supportive and sometimes they try for me to be comfortable and to stick to my diet more than I do. Nevertheless, there are also some people that make fun of my choice. They are people of mostly my age that would ask silly questions and that even sometimes would make me feel uncomfortable. And some of them do respect my choice but are completely against it, as they cannot accept that not eating meat is something normal. I am very glad however that, due to the fact that I am the first person in my close circle that has turned vegetarian, many of my friends are thinking of following the same path, as they see how good I feel about my body. It is very important that I grew up in an environment where I felt safe to discuss my concerns and that there was healthy discussion around matters of importance to me. I knew that my opinion would matter to my parents and that gave me the motive to feel free to explore and learn about vegetarianism and a healthier lifestyle in general.

Quotes

All these animals being killed to be available on our plates.

I started talking with other people and started watching some relevant documentaries.

I am lucky that my body can stand it.

I was also very lucky that my family supported my choice.

Keywords

Cruel, documentaries, healthier, vegan, expensive, carbon emission

RL6_RO01, Romania, Expensive sustainable food

Narrative



I am a 65-year-old woman living in a north-eastern city of Romania together with my husband. I have worked in construction and in the legal field, but a few years ago, I had a car accident. Because of it I was forced to retire before the official retiring age and consequently have a rather small pension. At the time being I would describe myself as being healthy, except for my impaired vision. Since birth I have had extreme myopia (-12), which means that, even with my glasses I have a visual acuity of maximum 60%. My food diet contains “all types of food: meat, dairy, vegetable and fruits, with the mention that my consumption of meat is restricted”. I eat meat only once or twice a week, usually I prefer fish, once every couple of weeks I have chicken and I haven't eaten red meat in the last 6 months.

When I choose the food that I buy I try to pick foods that I like and that are not processed, such as fruits, vegetables. Also I need to make choices that are affordable. Related to fish I prefer salmon or oceanic frozen fish. Most of the time, I prefer foods that don't have to be cooked, such as salads or vegetables that can be eaten raw, because I prefer their taste. Another reason is that many times I am too tired to cook or I don't have time. But there are times when I also cook. “For example now that it is winter, I cook more often because the vegetables from the supermarket don't have the same taste, like those from the traditional market.” In the hot season I mostly salad, especially tomato salad but during the cold season the tomatoes that are available and are also tasty are too expensive. For example the tomatoes that I mostly find are imported, and are a type that even when it is ripped is very hard and tasteless. In order to buy tastier tomatoes I would have to pay 3 times more, and there are very few times when I can afford that. The same is true also for lettuce, green onion and other similar vegetables, so in the cold season I eat more potatoes, beans, that need to be cooked.

The source of the food I buy also has an influence on my choices. “I prefer to consume vegetables that are produced in our own country by the small local farmers, because I have faith that they offer healthier more sustainable products, that they use less fertilisers and so on [...]. Also I want to help and encourage the local producers, it is in my interest that they produce more” because if the demand increases the supply also increases and I have more variety to choose from. I think that the persons that have a vegan diet are very healthy, energetic, open minded and calm; that they care about their health and also about the wellbeing of animals. With respect to the link between the food industry and the environment I believe that one of the most important reasons for the negative impact of the first one on the latter is the desire to increase, by all means the production. One of the effects is the use of toxic substances, like fertilisers that pollute the soil. Then the food needs to be processed in factories and all this creates waste. After that the food needs to be transported which also causes toxic emissions, and so on. Also, I believe that the animal industry is a big contributing factor to this negative impact. The animals need spaces to grow, and a lot of resources that are also required for the processing of the meat. This is why I believe that reducing especially the consumption of meat would be very good for the environment. It is also true that such a mass production is necessary in order to be able to feed all the people, but I believe that this would decrease considerably if people were more conscious about how much food they consume and if they stopped wasting it. “For example now we are getting closer to the winter holidays and it is a known fact that in this period tons of food is wasted, at least in our country.” To sum up, I think that a conscious ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet based more on fruits and vegetable would be the best for the environment, but the first thing that pops

into my mind when I think of sustainable food is fruits and vegetable. Although I know some of the links between the food we consume and the environment, to be honest I don't really think about them, or take them into account when I make my daily choices. The financial reasons are probably the most important factors that keep me from making sustainable choices, especially now that it is winter. Another factor would be their taste, again in the cold season the affordable sustainable foods are not so tasty.

I consider that I am not involved in sustainable and ecological food practices, and I am not even sure how I could do that. Actually, if we take into account the waste produced by the foods I buy the fact that I am selectively collecting them could be considered as a sustainable behaviour. And also I try not to waste food, and consume everything I have bought. If I think about the factors that stop me from having a sustainable diet the first reason I can think of is the price. For me, in order to have a more sustainable diet I should be possible to buy, all through the year, tasty and affordable vegetable. When I think about the other people, I also think that the main reason why they can't have a sustainable diet is the price. Then there is another category of people where the budget is not a problem, but the education regarding food practices is.

In the future I would like to be among the people that make sustainable choices, I would like to eliminate meat from my diet, maybe only keeping some fish, and I would like to consume more fruits and vegetable than I do now.

Quotes

I prefer to consume vegetables that are produced in our own country by the small local farmers, because I have faith that they offer healthier more sustainable products, that they use less fertilisers and so on [...]. Also I want to help and encourage the local producers, it is in my interest that they produce more.

I would be able to make more sustainable choices if during the winter I could buy from the store tastier vegetables and if their price would be cheaper.

From my point of view the price is too expensive, I know that there are other people that don't think about that, but for me it is too expensive.

Keywords

Affordability, price, availability, vegetarian diet, taste

RL6_RO02, Romania, Expensive sustainable food



Narrative

I am a 70-year-old-man from a north-eastern city of Romania. I am retired now, but I have worked in medicine producing factories. A few years after retirement I have continued to work in part time jobs, to increase our household income, but because of some health issues and other circumstances I had to stop. I live with my wife in a one-bedroom apartment with a very small yard.

I would describe my diet as “complete and balanced”. I consume all types of foods such as fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, eggs, and so on. I have some foods that I don’t eat, for example seafood because I don’t like the taste. The taste is very important for me when I decide which foods to buy, and also their price is a criteria, other than that, I wouldn’t say I have other values associated to my food choices. There are times when I would like to buy something but I can not afford it. For example, in some seasons I can’t afford to buy forest fruits, and there are also other products like some kinds of cheese or beef meat.

I usually prefer to cook my own meals, I am simply used this way but there are also some vegetable like tomatoes, cabbage, cucumber, that I also eat raw, especially during the summer. Then I consume a lot more fruits and vegetables. Sometimes I combine a home cooked meal with salads, for example. I like to buy my vegetables and fruits from the local market but when I buy meat it is always from the supermarket, I find it safer that way. When it comes to dairy, sometimes I buy them from the supermarket, and other times from the local market.

I think that the persons that choose a vegan diet are preoccupied by their health, “there are studies that have shown that eating meat leads to agitation and nervousity”. There are also those concerned that we should not “kill animals and should not eat corpses”. Personally I think that people are supposed to have an omnivorous diet that also includes meat, but I can’t say which one is healthier. I think it is also a habit we have, we are used to eating meat, almost everybody eats meat.

When I think about the environment, the way it is influenced by the food industry, and what we could do about it, I think the best practice would be to reduce our overall consumption. I think “it is consumed and produced more than we need” and “I also think that there are people that eat more than they should”. There are also people that buy more than they consume and as a consequence “throw away some of the food”. There are also ads that promote a reduced consumption, especially with respect to some types of foods, interviews with doctors that discuss the effects of eating too much. I think a reduced consumption could have positive effects not only on the environment but also on the personal level on the over-all health of the people. Another issue I see is the waste, because a lot of the garbage we produce is resulted from the way the food is packed. For example, plastic is used in a lot of packages in order to make them more easily sold in the self-service isles of the stores, and this creates a lot of waste. A responsible behaviour would mean buying less products that are pre-packed but most of the time people are in a hurry, they make just a quick stop to the supermarket, and prefer to shop something quickly than wait in line at the assisted-service isle.

When I think about the foods that contribute to the sustainability of the environment I think of fruits and vegetable. I don’t think they have a negative impact, “on the contrary if we think about the fruits grow in trees – it has a positive impact because trees produce oxygen, and plants in general are beneficial for the environment.” At least as long as

chemical pesticides and fertilisers are not used and biological alternatives are used instead.

The vegan diet is also sustainable but not many people can do it. Maybe reducing the meat and dairy consumption could be a solution, because both negatively impact sustainability.

I wouldn't say that sustainability of the environment is one of the criteria based on which I choose what food I buy, I simply don't think about it. I think it is important for the environment but it is not important for me. However, I have other sustainable practices such as "selectively collecting the waste and recycling it".

When I choose food I don't think about the environment, I simply pick the ones I like and that I can afford. The nice packages do not influence me, quite the opposite I avoid such products because I consider this an issue because I do not use the package I just "throw it away, and some of it can be recycled, but other cannot." "Moreover, there are "a lot of materials and paints consumed to make these packages and this pollutes" the environment.

Another way I am involved in a sustainable alimentation would be collecting the waste of certain fruits or vegetables drying it and using it as fertiliser. But I do this mostly during the summer, so that I am able to dry it in the sun. It would be difficult for me to change my food behaviours and adopt a more sustainable diet because I am not used to think in this way. I am trying to reduce the consumption of meat but it is difficult. If I don't eat meat I don't feel full after a meal and I don't like the taste of certain foods without meat. I think that if I were to change my diet the reason would be related to my health and not the environment.

In general, I don't think that environment sustainability is sufficiently mediatized, moreover people are tired stressed, have less and less time and I don't think they would be willing to take on another load.

Quotes

I think "it is consumed and produced more than we need" and "I also think that there are people that eat more than they should.

When I buy food I just buy it and that is all, I don't think about anything else. Fruits, vegetables and cereals are the most sustainable foods, excepting when various chemicals are used.

If I were to adopt a sustainable diet in the future it would be due to health reasons.

Keywords

Affordable prices, taste, recycle, moderation consumption, health

RL6_RO03, Romania, The power of habits

Narrative

I am a 35-year-old single mother from a north-eastern city of Romania. I work a full-time job, while also taking care of my 7 years old son. I am the only one in my family that lives in the city, my parents and my sister live in another city, so most of the times I am the only caregiver to my son. I would describe my diet at complete, it consists of dairy, meat, vegetables, essentially all the food groups. Almost all of the time I prefer to cook my food and avoid buying pre-cooked meals or take-out. I want to control the ingredients I use, the way they are cooked and most importantly I “have a child to raise and he needs to eat healthy”.

Most of the time when I buy food, especially in the last period of time, I look carefully at the label, and make sure that the ingredients used are healthy, that it does not contain additives, preservatives and so on. I want them to be “as clean as possible”, especially when I buy dairy. When I buy vegetables, I choose the ones that are from Romania, and when I buy exotic fruits or vegetables that do not grow in our country, I choose the ones that are labelled BIO. The origin of the foods is very important for me, I prefer local fruits and vegetables. Also, the time of the year has a direct influence on my choices, because I like to buy fruits and vegetables that are in season. For example, during the spring and summer I buy cherries or strawberries, and during the autumn and winter apples. I do the same thing for vegetables, as much as I can, but there are vegetables, such as carrots, celery, potatoes and so on, that I have to buy even when they are not in season.

Usually “I don’t have time to go to the local market so I shop from the supermarket and there I choose from the Romanian products.” I would like to go more often to the local market “and I would if I had one closer”. “It is more comfortable for me to shop from the supermarket that is close to the place where I live” and it takes less time. With respect to the people that choose the vegan diet I think that their main reasons are related to health. But I also believe that nowadays it is fashionable, like a trend.

I think there is a major impact of the products we buy on the environment and I became aware of that quite recently. I know that the cattle, regardless of the fact that they are raised for their meat or for the dairy industry, represent one of the main factors responsible for the pollution of earth and the environment.

The best diet for the environment would be a vegan diet containing of “fruits, vegetables and unprocessed foods”. The processed foods also pollute by the use of additives and packages that also affect the environment. Personally, “I try to use less processed foods, to recycle the packages that I throw away” but the environment “is not the main factor I think about, our health and my desire to eat healthy is”.

The main factor that keeps me from buying more sustainable products is my habit, and the fact that “it is difficult to change the behaviours we are used to and make better choices. It is not impossible but it is difficult”. When I think about my child, I am more motivated to make more sustainable choices because “I would like to create a different routine for him”, I would like him to be “conscious about the way our choices can impact the environment”, ‘I would like him to learn a different routine than the one I was taught so that it would be easier for him in the future”.

For example now I teach him to recycle, or when we go shopping I explain to him “why we cannot buy a certain product,” and tell him what “effects it has on our health”. But related to the effects on the environment, at the time being we talk only about recycling. Even though I am conscious about the importance of sustainable food choices for the environment, my main concern at the time being for both me and my son is to make healthy choices, not necessarily sustainable ones.

In the future the main reasons that could help me in having a more sustainable diet would be to have a local-market, like a farmer’s market closer to my home. This would also solve the time problem I have. Right now “I could go in the other side of the town at the first available local-market but I do not have the time” to do that.

I think it is the same for most people, they also have non-sustainable habits, that keep them from making environment-friendly choices. Moreover, sometimes the price for bio-products is more expensive, which could be a problem for some people. And “another factor is education”, we are simply not raised in this way. I think that, especially in Romania the main reason why some people, including myself, adopt a sustainable diet, or at least some habits, is related to health, and environment sustainability is more a side effect, than the other way around. I would like to make more sustainable choices in the future such as to reduce the meat I consume. For example, now I eat meat almost daily, and I would like to eat only 2 or 3 times a week. I would like to do this especially for my son but it is especially difficult because for him “every meal has to contain meat”. But as I have said before, the main reason I would like to reduce the meat we eat is to be able to increase the consumption of vegetable, so it is related to health reasons and not the environment.

Quotes

I have a child to raise and he needs to eat healthy.

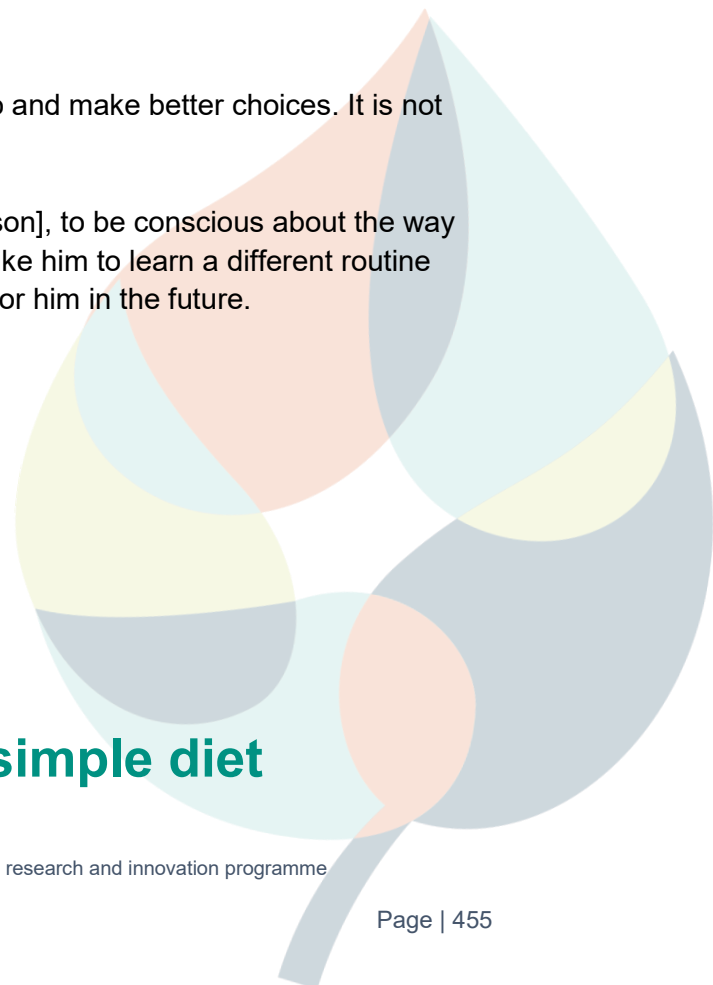
It is difficult to change the behaviours we are used to and make better choices. It is not impossible but it is difficult.

I would like to create a different routine for him [her son], to be conscious about the way our choices can impact the environment and would like him to learn a different routine than the one I was taught so that it would be easier for him in the future.

Keywords

Habits, health, time, my child, routine

RL6_RO04, Romania, The simple diet



Narrative

I am a 38-year-old woman, from a north-eastern city of Romania. I have a 4-years old daughter, and since almost three years ago I have been a single mother. I do not wish to talk about the causes of my divorce, but because of it, my ex-husband has very little involvement in my daughter's life. My parents sometime help me with my daughter, but most of the time I am her only caregiver. My food diet is not that special, it is "balanced, and varied. I eat foods from all the food groups, so that nutritiously it is more than enough." The same is true for my daughter, except for nuts, because she is allergic to them. When I decide what food I buy, I take into "account the country of origin, and I choose those that are from Romania, I choose fresh products, and I prefer those that not pre-wrapped". I buy vegetable from the local stores in my neighbourhood, I have a grocery store, a meat store, a bakery and a store that sells locally produced eggs. I prefer local products because this way I know that they are fresh and I have faith that they are less treated. It is important for me to know the way that product was raised and its source. I also believe that the products that are transported on long distances need to be treated in order to maintain their aspect. The season also influences my choices, I like to eat in-season vegetables: in the summer I eat more fruits and salads, especially green leaves, during autumn eggplants or tomatoes and in the cold season I eat more root vegetables, meat, dairy, polenta and so on. But in the autumn, I buy in-season Romanian root vegetables that are reasonably priced, which I chop and store for the winter time, so that I always cook with local vegetables. However, the price is not the main criteria on which I choose what I buy, but their health benefits. I always like to cook my meals, I like the taste of cooked meals, I consider it "food for the body and the soul".

I think the people that adopt a vegan diet are informed, conscious about their health and intelligent. Probably the main reason one adopts this diet is health. I have also been vegan for a period of time, because of a health problem, but once I got healthy, I started to eat all food categories again. Moreover, I have done some research in the meantime and I believe that people should consume all categories of food, and I feel best eating everything. My daughter also prefers meat. My approach related to her diet was self-diversification, and she choose, ever since she was little, to eat meat, I didn't impose it, I offered everything and let her pick what she likes.

I think there is a link between food choices and climate change, for example if we wish to buy many exotic foods this implies processing, transportation, and all this consumes resources, costs and pollutes. And if we, as consumers create a demand for such products, we ensure there will be a supply.

Ideally, I think the best thing we can do for the environment is to grow our own food, we still have these kinds of resources, but "if we cannot do that we should support the local producers that do this for us". We still value this in our country because we know people that live in villages and still work the land, that naturally raise chickens or cattle. "We know people [local farmers] from whom we can buy eggs, milk, meat, we buy cheese from the sheepfold, we know how to make bread, we cook" and these values are important for us.

I think that buying from the local producers we support the small-scale production in the detriment of the large-scale one that uses industrialized halls which pollute. I read a book that really influenced me "The Omnivore's Dilemma" and I learned from that book that the "most responsible behaviours we can have is to know what is the source of our

food and to try to eat local products as much as possible has the smallest impact on the environment.” I think the best diet for the environment is a simple one.

The thoughts I have about the environment really influence my food choices. For example if “I want to eat a salad [in the cold season] I simply cannot allow myself to buy a pre-wrapped salad bag because I think about all the resources and labour necessary for me to eat a salad once, and this is harmful to the environment. I prefer to buy some [local] parsley and make my own salad”. Or buy spinach, “even if it is grown in a greenhouse, it is simply picked-up and sold in the local stores, it is not washed, or wrapped and so on”. Another way in which I have sustainable habits is I never waste food. I buy only as much as I cook, I don’t shop large amounts of food. If I happen to cook too much food I give it away to neighbours, or work colleagues.

There are factors that hinder me from making sustainable choices such as my cravings. Sometimes I crave parmesan and not “telemea”(a traditional salty cheese) I want salmon, and not crucian carp. Also, there are some healthy choices such as avocado that don’t have a Romanian equivalent with the same nutritive qualities. Another factor is time: for example the local market is opened during specific intervals and is closed when I get off from work. Other time some products are not available: for example, in certain days there is no fish at the local store, but there is always fish in the supermarket.

Also, the involvement more responsibility of other people or the authorities would help me make more sustainable choices. For example “in the local market it is becoming more and more difficult to be sure that the products are really locally produced. If there would be a little more involved from other people and from the authorities, if they would check the source of the products” I would feel safer buying. I know people that buy Turkish vegetables and sell them in the local market as locally produced. Personally, in order to avoid that I buy only from certain people I know, or were recommended to me. If I think at other people, I think that the lack of information and their commodity are the main reasons that keep them from making sustainable choices. We don’t have national strategies in place the provide information related to “supporting the local producers or to the health benefits of consuming local products [...] for an European country we have a deficit in this matter”.

Quotes

Ideally the best thing would be to grow our own food [...] but if we cannot do that we should support the local producers that do this for us.

In the local market it is becoming more and more difficult to be sure that the products are really locally produced. There should be a little more involved from other people and from the authorities, that should check the source of the products.

Keywords

Simple diet, Romanian foods, local producers, local stores, responsibility, authorities



RL6_RO05, Romania, Lack of information

Narrative

I am 21-year-old woman, from a north-eastern city of Romania. I have been abandoned by my parents since I was little and have been placed in the care of a foster parent until the age of 18. Since then, I have been living on my own, working to support myself while also being a student.

I would describe my diet as semi-healthy “I try to eat healthy at least two times a week, or at least to not eat so much sugar” but many times a week I eat sandwiches with sausages because I like them. I don’t think I associate any specific values with food, but when I choose what food, I buy I usually take into account their expiration time. I have a very chaotic eating schedule: sometimes I eat only a fruit a day, and I feel fine, other days I eat three meals and I don’t like my food to go bad. When I am in the mood, which usually happens approximately 2 times a week I try to cook my meals, but because my cooking skill are very limited, I prepare only very simple food. My foster parents were very strict when it came the food so I could not have a say in it or experiment with cooking. Even so, there are times that I miss the taste of a home cooked meal, so then I cook. Evidently, another criteria based on which I choose the products I buy is how easily they are to be coked.

The taste is also a central factor that determines which food I buy. “I have a very high sensitivity to food, to their aspect, texture, colour and smell and if anything is not in order with them or at least to one of them I refuse to eat it. “ Probably the most peculiar thing that influences my choices is “if eating a certain food produces any sounds”. I have misophonia so I can’t stand „to hear people eating and I don’t even stand hearing myself chew, even if it is something normal. I can’t stand if even if I hear just a little bit, so usually I have to play music”, to distract myself. “For example, if I want to buy an apple, I think will it make any sounds when I eat it, yes it would, so then I just don’t buy it”. And I also avoid hard foods, “when I was little, I had a problem with my teeth” which made me prefer soft aliments, and I still do, even if I don’t have a problem anymore. The season or the source of the aliments do not influence my food choices. I would say that the price is a more important criteria.

I believe that people who adopt a vegan diet are very empathetic especially towards animals and have better care of their health. Personally, I don’t think I could ever become a vegan because “I don’t want to make drastic changes to my diet and I don’t like to abstain from eating what I want”. Moreover “it is not in my values set, I would need to change my mentality first and then my diet”. Maybe I could give up eating meat, but I could never give up dairy or eggs. I don’t think a lot about the link between the food we consume and the climate change, I don’t know in which way the first one could influence the latter. I imagine there is a link, I just don’t know it.

If I think a little better, I think there could be a link between agriculture and the changes in nature. For example, if “I have a garden where I grow vegetable, I use

pesticides which go into the ground, and affect the insects, so it has a negative impact on the whole eco-system". If I think that the dairy industry doesn't influence negatively the climate, on the contrary I think it is actually sustainable because we take only the excess. It is the same case with the eggs or the honey, I don't think it has a negative impact. In my opinion only killing the animals for their meat has a negative impact on the climate but I am not sure how "it is the first time I think about it". So, I don't have any values associated with this. Actually, I think that in general people don't think about it, it is not a debated topic, at least not in my circle of friends and acquaintances, or on social media.

Maybe if I had come across some information related to this topic it would have had an effect on my food preferences. This could be one of the reasons why I don't have any preoccupations about sustainable foods. I think sustainable foods "are important for the environment, at a macrolevel" but for me it is not right now. "Maybe it is because I am only 20 years old", so it is not a priority for me right now, but probably in the future it will be. And I don't know what I could change as an individual so that it causes a change in this respect, I think it might have an effect on my health, but not on the environment. If I were to adopt a more sustainable diet in the future the main reason would be my health, not the environment.

Right now, the main reason why I don't adopt a sustainable diet is that the product labelled as bio "are a lot more expensive" and in general there are very few bio products compared to the rest. I think that if there were more products, and if they would be advertised more it would be easier. Also, I am not in a point in my life where I feel ready to make a drastic change regarding my diet, and moreover I am very easily influenced by the people around me. "For example last summer when I was living with my vegetarian girlfriend I did not eat meat at all because I didn't want her to feel bad", so "I need to be surrounded with people that also eat healthy so that it can influence me". This is my case, if I think at other people, I believe the main reason they don't adopt a sustainable diet is the lack of interest and of information, because we don't know that some products have negative effects

Quotes

I don't think a lot about the link between the food we consume and the climate change.

The taste is also a central factor that determines which food I buy.

Keywords

Lack of information, sustainable alternatives, peers' influence, financial resources,



RL6_RO06, Romania, The industrialization of the food

Narrative

I am a 24-year-old woman from Sudan. I have been living in Romania for a few years now where I am a PhD student. The fact that my parents have very low incomes, and that the education opportunities are very limited in my country of origin represent the main reasons I chose to study in Romania. My religion is Islam, Musselman.

My food habits are very simple, which also means that many times I have the same food. For example, many of my meals consist in foods like cheese, sandwiches, slides of ham, especially in this period of time because I am a student and I am also working. There are also times when I cook some simple foods, but it depends on my schedule. Sometimes when I am working I just have breakfast and I skip lunch, sometimes maybe even dinner, and the main reason I do this is because I don't have time. I eat all the types of foods, excepting some to which I am allergic. I don't eat any eggs or foods that contains them. To be honest I eat less vegetables than I could consider health because I don't like the taste of some them, such as eggplant, for example. This also creates problems for me in eating out for example. I have to carefully read all the ingredients of the food I order because sometimes there are eggs even in the sauce of a dish. When I decide what foods I buy I make the choices based on "what I need, what I can prepare and what I feel like eating", I can't think of anything specific or any valued associated with it. The price of the food has a big influence on the food I buy, so most of the time I buy affordable food, but there are also times when I buy more expensive food such as pre-cooked meals because I don't have time and I need it prepare anything. The country of origin of a product does not matter for me, nor if it is locally produced. "I am interested in its quality and everything I like I buy". The season has less influence on my diet since I moved to Romania. For example, when I lived in Sudan, we mostly used the in-season fruits and vegetables, we were depended on them because we almost never bought imported products. The main reasons were their price and low availability. But here in Romania I can buy most of the foods I like.

I don't believe that the vegan diet is healthy because for us because our body needs all types of food, even meat a dairy. But even if my I am not a vegan or even a vegetarian, sometimes I find myself in the vegan isle of a supermarket searching vegan sweets for example, because of my egg allergy. For me personally, it is important that I include in my diet meat and dairy, but even if I don't agree to it, I think everybody should choose what they feel comfortable with. I wouldn't choose it for myself, but I have nothing against the people that do. I also don't think about the way that animals are treated in the farms, "it is not a concern for me I don't think about it". I also don't know what could be the link between climate change and the farms or the food that we choose to buy. I think we should make changes in order to stop climate change, I don't exactly know how, but I definitely think that making drastic changes in our diets is not the solution. I think the industry of the food should change because the technology used to process food influences the climate. "Everything has an influence in our planet but I don't think it is just

the food.” The industry needs to make food that looks that good and “appear to have a good quality so it uses a lot of fertilisers and that is a big problem”. If it would be less concerned about the appearance of the food, some of the problem would resolve itself. In my opinion the desire of the companies to make a lot of food and the competition between them to make cheap products and also increase productivity is the real problem.

If the agriculture should also be simpler with less fertilisers and genetic modification. This is true also about the meat or the dairy industry. They want to sell a lot, a lot of different types of meat sometimes with little care about its quality. I think it should be simpler than this, then we wouldn't have all these problems. Even the process that makes food last more, so that it can be kept in the supermarkets for 1 year or maybe more are detrimental to the climate. When I think of sustainable foods, I think of foods that are not processed and are grown in a simple manner. I know I should change my diet in the future, I know that some of my habits are wrong but for me it is not that important right now. Maybe I will think about my health when I will be getting older, but right now it is not a priority. Now I am young, I am healthy and “I have other priorities such as studying, working” making affordable choices and I don't have time to think about the sustainability of the food. “My concern is to buy quality foods from all the food groups”.

If I think about the other people, I also think the price is the main reason that keeps them from making sustainable choices. The conception they have about food, and the fact that they don't have the correct information about it.

Quotes

I will think about my health when I will be getting older, right now I have other priorities such as studying, working.

The competition between the companies that make the food to increase the productivity, that is the problem [...] and I don't think that making drastic changes in our diets is the solution.

Everything has an influence in our planet but I don't think it is just the food.

Keywords

Industrialisation of the food, increased productivity, fertilisers, lack of time, other priorities, quality of the food

RL6_RO07, Romania, A collective small change for the future



Narrative

I am 20 years old and a student in a north-eastern University of Romania. I used to live in a village, together with my parents, but I have moved to the city a couple of years ago, when I started the faculty.

Thinking about my diet I would rate it on a 1 to 10 scale with a 6. Right now, I am pescetarian, and I'm trying to transition towards a vegetarian diet and in the end a vegan one. Even if I don't eat meat, I don't feel that my diet is as healthy as it could be. I would be able to eat healthier if I had more time to cook; the food I eat at the cafeteria has a lot of fats and fried aliments in it. I also eat eggs and dairy, but usually I receive them from my mother who lives in the countryside. Of course, there are also times when I buy them from the supermarket, but usually they are from a controlled source.

I have many values associated to food. For example, the main reason I transitioned to a pescetarian diet are the "ethical reasons: the empathy I have for animals". A secondary reason is related to the health benefits, I feel better since I have stopped eating meat.

My diet usually consists of cooked food, but I rarely have time to cook for myself, usually I eat at the cafeteria. My parents also help me by sending me already cooked food. The season also influences my choices, for example during the summer I mostly eat salads, but in the cold season it is difficult for me to have access to fresh vegetables. This is why I sometimes freeze some vegetables, in order to be able to eat them in the winter also.

I have started only recently to check, at the supermarket the country of origin of the food I buy, especially vegetables. But "being a student it is very difficult for me to choose Romanian products because the price difference is quite high".

I think that the persons that have a vegan diet are very brave because they have to fight stereotypes. Moreover, I find them determined because there are times when there are not so many vegan alternatives, for example at restaurants.

I think there is a link between climate change and the foods we consume. For example I know that "the food production has a very negative effect on the soil. The mass production does not take into account the qualities of the soil and" repeated cultivation depletes it "after a period of time [...]. I know that we need to ensure one year break in cultivating the soil".

I also think that using more natural fertilisers would be also more beneficial for the environment. In this respect I also believe that selectively collecting waste is important, because otherwise it also affects the soil and biosphere. Moreover, I think informing people on alternative recycling strategies, for example making compost would be also beneficial.

In this respect I think that equipping the town with large containers that collect only the type of waste that can be turned into compost, would help me make even more sustainable choices. "I strongly believe that that the smallest change in our diet is beneficial for the environment. I don't advocate for everyone becoming a vegetarian or a vegan I once read a study that showed that if everybody gave up eating meat for one day, supposed they eat meat 7 days a week, just cutting one day would make a significant change. Clary there is a diet" [vegan] that is the most beneficial "but if people would make that change even for health reasons because the doctors don't even recommend eating meat daily it would make a significant change".

I think that the information I have related to a sustainable diet influence the choices I make but I also believe I still have to work on that. I would like to take even more sustainable choices but sometimes it is difficult, because of the price.

Besides of the food choices I always try to keep up with the information. “I have participated to the young people of Romania summit that was about sustainability” and I also try to share that information. For example, I am trying to implement a compost station in my parents’ yard “but it is difficult because our production is not that high”. I also brought a friend to the summit and he did manage to make a compost station in his yard. Moreover, he is a student at bio-engineering and he is thinking at ways he could implement similar stations on a larger scale, when he finishes his studies and starts working.

I think that in media there are “more and more information related to this subject but I don’t think it is enough”. It is important to be aware of the link between the food we consume and our health. For example, I have read a study that linked the consume of mass production meat, which uses unhealthy substances such as hormones with peoples’ food intolerances. But even if people are aware that imported tomatoes are less healthy, it is difficult to buy the Romanian ones because of the price differences.

I think that the “doctors, psychologist and other specialist, that are influential people should promote more the reduction of meat consumption. It is encouraged but rather for people that have certain health issues like diabetics, I think it should be promoting a prevention diet, before having health problems”. Also, I have heard people that avoid natural products because of their appearance making comments such as “look those apples have holes, or those tomatoes are bigger” and this actually means they are healthy, but people don’t know that. And as I have said before I think educating people and encouraging them to reduce the consume of meat and buying more local products would be a first step towards increased sustainability.

Another encouraging factor is the fact that the bio products are starting to be more and more available in the supermarkets. However, they are still hard to find, and can be found only in the supermarkets, and not in small stores.

I also wish it existed more transparency related to food origin, and have more information available about the products, not only their country of origin, but also the conditions in which they are raised. For example, in the free-market I wish I found only food that is bio, it is only from local farmers.

Quotes

I strongly believe that the smallest change in our diet is beneficial for the environment. I don’t advocate for everyone becoming a vegetarian or a vegan I once read a study that showed that if everybody gave up eating meat for one day, supposed they eat meat seven days a week, just cutting one day would make a significant change. Clearly, there is a diet [vegan] that is the most beneficial.

But if people would make that change even for health reasons because the doctors don’t even recommend eating meat daily it would make a significant change.

Keywords

RL6_RO08, Romania, The raw vegan diet

Narrative

I am a 42-year-old woman from a north-eastern city of Romania and I live together with my husband and son. Both me and my son have health issues that limit our diet. My son has type two diabetes and I have hormonal imbalances and major thyroid dysfunction.

The diet I have right now is different from the one I had a year ago. Approximately 10 months ago I completely gave up eating meat, and 6 months ago I also gave up dairy and gluten. Now I have a vegan diet and mostly eat raw food: about 70% of my diet is composed of raw vegetables and fruits especially sprouts. I wish to transition completely to a raw gluten-free vegan diet but I have not been able to do that until now.

Also, I have started to be more careful to the composition of the foods I buy, being careful that they contain as few ingredients as possible and that don't contain preservatives, additives or rapeseed oil. But mostly I avoid buying these types of products and prefer to cook my own food. When I buy food, I mostly choose bio-products but I prefer to make my own food, for example I grow my own sprouts. But I find it difficult to buy truly bio vegetables and fruits because we do not promote Romanian products, instead we mostly import them, and imported products are very unhealthy. This is why I have also reduced the consumption of fruits, and instead I choose nuts, almonds, and seeds that I hydrate or germinate. The most important value that influences my food choices is related to health. When I found about this life style, "I started to read more about it and about how I could best implement it", and it has really had an impact on the way I feel. My goal is to cure my thyroid, but I also discovered out that my memory and mood improved: I feel calmer and more energetic. For example, in a book I read "How to cure your thyroid" I found out the negative effects of eating meat, dairy and products that contain pesticides on the thyroid.

The season influences my choices in the sense that during the summer I eat more fruits and vegetables and during the winter more green juice and sprouts. It is very important for me to consume Romanian products because imported vegetables and fruits are chemically treated. It is difficult for me because "I can't always trust the labels, some products claim that are Romanian but in fact they are not, this is why I use recommendation [...] and I buy products from trusted sources".

"I believe our culture is wonderful and we should support it and stop buying garbage – this is the way them [imported products]".

I think the vegan diet is the healthiest choice one can make and more people should adhere to it. Especially people that have health issues because most of them could be

resolved through such a diet, but instead people prefer to take pills. I encourage people to read about this diet and its effects before.

I think there are also people that love animals and became vegans because of that, and honestly, I respect them even more than the people who were determined by health reasons to adopt this diet. I also believe that changing one's diet in such a way produces spiritual growth. And finally, I think there are a lot of resources that are involved in raising and sacrificing animals. For example, the high necessity of food determines companies to use a lot of "unorthodox shortcuts in order to maximise production, and this clearly negatively influences the environment". The best food that has the smallest negative impact on the environment "is the one we raise ourselves, you take a seed, you plant it, only use natural fertiliser and water", and we can do this "even in our own home I grow sprouts and wheat grass". I think this is the most sustainable thing we can do.

Honestly, even if my diet is sustainable my concerns towards the environment did not represent the major decisional factor. However, besides my food choices I also have other green habits, for example I don't throw away used oil, and I use cleaning products and detergents that are less harmful for the environment.

I am very concerned about the quality of the water we drink. I wish more people were more responsible with the waste they produce and where they choose to throw it away. I think we produce more and more waste and I remember when I was a little girl there was significantly less waste. It is "like a vicious circle because people don't realise that the pollution of the environment directly affects the quality of the products they consume". I confess that I did not use to think like this but the groups I am apart of and the books I read really helped me, and I wish more and more people were aware of this.

When I think about the factors that stop me from making even more sustainable choices I think of my own habits. It is difficult to make such a change and sometimes I have cravings towards cooked foods that don't come from a sustainable source. Because I "don't know if the products I buy are really bio, like it says on the label". And also, because I don't live in a house, I am not able to grow all the fruits and vegetables I would like.

When I think about the other people, I think that their desire to eat foods that have intense taste is a factor that stops them from making sustainable choices. And also, this old idea that if you eat much and divers you are healthy when in fact this is not the case, people are healthier when they eat simple.

Quotes

I believe our culture is wonderful and we should support it and stop buying garbage – this is the way them [imported products].

The best food with the smallest negative impact on the environment is the one we raise ourselves, you take a seed, you plant it, only use natural fertiliser and water, and we can do this even in our own home I grow sprouts and wheat grass.

Keywords



Raw vegan diet, health, information, support groups, local Romanian products

RL6_RO09, Iasi, Lack of information

Narrative

I am a 34-year-old woman, living in a north-eastern city of Romania. Most of my childhood I was raised by my grandparents because my mother died when I was little and my father had some health issues. I live alone and work a demanding full-time job at a multinational company. My program is often very long and sometimes chaotic, depending on the projects I work on.

My diet has changed quite recently. I used to eat many times during the day but now I mostly eat two times a day, maximum three. In the morning I usually make a fruit smoothie – to give me energy for the day, and then I eat in the evening usually fish with noodles, pasta, or vegetables. Sometimes I have a little snack between these meals, like a sandwich. There are also foods I avoid such as dairy, gluten, or meat. I rarely make exceptions usually only when I go out, for example I eat meat maybe once or twice a week.

When I buy food, I look for aliments that are easily digested. I love the taste of cooked food, but I don't like to cook, and I don't have time. My cooking skills are also underdeveloped. Probably because even since I was a little girl I was not allowed to cook, my grandparent cooked for me, so I didn't take part in such activities, and did not learn to appreciate them. This is why when I do cook I always prepare something very simple.

I like to eat in-season fruits, for example I eat grapes only in the late summer of autumn, but there are also fruits such as bananas and oranges that I eat throughout the entire year. I cannot say the same for vegetable though, I don't take into account the season when I choose them. When I buy fruits and vegetables "I am not really interested in their origin, I check if the label says organic or Bio".

I think that people that chose the vegan diet should be appreciated, I think they are strong. I have tried it but I was not able to maintain it. I think that this diet "is healthier and more beneficial for the environment" but I couldn't say exactly why.

I think that it is healthier in general to stop eating meat because the animal suffers when it is being treated or sacrificed in a non-humane way, and somehow we take on that sufferance when we consume its meat. "And I really like animals, this would be the primary reason" why I would try again the vegan diet.

The vegetables we eat could also affect the environment, for example if they are grown with pesticides and artificial fertilisers, those substances go into the soil and this has negative effects. I think the best eating behaviours for the environment would be "organic fruits and vegetables, fish and meat as little as possible". If "I think at our grandparents and the way they used to grow their own vegetables, I think we could change our behaviours in a positive way but nowadays people moved to the cities, we work in front of computers, we buy from the supermarket" where everything is pre-packed in plastic... For example, "yesterday I bought coriander and it was wrapped in 3 plastic

boxes and 3 bags. So, for a bunch of leaves, that could have very easily been sold as they were, I bought so much plastic. But this is the way I found in the supermarket”.

I find it very serious that we use so much plastic that pollutes and affects the food we consume. A more sustainable choice would be to buy from the local-market, where the vegetables are not wrapped in plastic, and although in Romania there are local-markets I still buy from the supermarket because it is easier and faster this way. “I find in one place everything I need, from clothes, detergents to foods”. Also, I have another personal reason, the fact that it is more comfortable, especially during winter because in the supermarket is warm, as opposed to the local-markets that are outside where it is cold.

“Unfortunately, I think only very seldom to the sustainability of the products, even if I am aware of the effects of my choices, I choose what it is easier for me”. The reason would be my schedule and the fact that “time is not enough”.

The only way I am involved in sustainable behaviours is through recycling and separating waste, although I know that not all the plastic can be recycled, at least some of it is. And another way is “If I can choose between a vegetable that is pre-wrapped in plastic and one that is not, I always choose the latter”. “The truth is that if I am 100% honest even when I make this choice I don’t think about the environment, but about the choice that creates less work for me, for example I don’t have another thing to throw away of recycle”. “Probably after this interview I will think more about it”. I think the main reason I don’t have more sustainable food choices is the lack of information. In my case for example when I received information about recycling it was very easy for me to apply it and I was happy to do it because I understood it. I think informing people should be priority. “For example, if we saw on the television more ads about how to make sustainable choices, and they way that our choices influence it, instead of supermarket commercials it would help me”. “My main problem is that I don’t think about it, I already have so many things in my mind, and I simply cannot think about the environment also”. Also, the commodity and availability of the products stops me from making more sustainable choices. I don’t find all the sustainable foods in one place so, in order to be able to go in many places and buy them I need to make a plan ahead. Right now, many times I quickly go to the nearest supermarket between meeting, I buy what I need and I am done. I think there is a general lack of interest and information related to this subject, nobody talks about it. I think that big promotional banner all through the town with information related to this subject, especially in commercial places would be efficient in informing people.

Quotes

Unfortunately, I think only very seldom to the sustainability of the products, even if I am aware of the effects of my choices, I choose what it is easier for me.

The reason would be my schedule and the fact that “time is not enough”.

My main problem is that I don’t think about it, I already have so many things in my mind, and I simply cannot think about the environment also.

Keywords

Recycle, packages, lack of information, time, commodity

RL6_RO10, Romania, The number one cause of pollution: the meat and dairy industry

Narrative

I am a 38-year-old-woman from a north-eastern city of Romania. Both my parents are from the city, I studied at the faculty of Letters, and my religious beliefs are agnostic. I live with my husband and almost two years old daughter and work at a multinational company where I have recently stated to go again after my maternity leave.

My diet has been vegan since almost six years ago. It mostly consists of vegetables, fruits and cereals; I like to cook my own meals and avoid processed foods. When I choose in-season fruits and vegetables I try to go to the local market and when I don't have enough time, I order from a local producer named "Home fruits and vegetables" that delivers them. That is a family-owned business and the fruits and vegetables are organic, grown without artificial fertilisers or pesticides. Moreover, I know that the seeds they use are also organic. If that is not possible, I choose the best available alternative from supermarket (e.g. organic vegetables), and if that also is not possible, I buy frozen vegetables.

I also try to buy from them or from the local markets products like tomato juice that I use for cooking, because I know that the products they use in making this products are also natural.

When I buy other processed products such as tofu or cheese for my daughter, I choose products that are labelled as Bio. I don't buy locally produced cheese because I believe it has a higher percentage of fat. My daughter has a varied diet consisting of all the food groups: fish, turkey meat, sometimes chicken, cheese, quail eggs, and fruits and vegetables. When I have time, I always try to cook the food I eat, excepting some foods that I buy canned like beans or chickpeas because they take a lot of time to boil. If I don't have time, I buy from restaurants that use fresh and natural ingredients (e.g. Ciorbaria), even if they are more expensive, and I never buy fried foods.

The season influences my choices of vegetables and fruits because I prefer the ones that are in-season. For example, during the summer it is easier for me to buy and eat fruits, and in the autumn I eat more pumpkin.

I think the people that adhere to a vegan diet are preoccupied by their health or ethical reasons. They know how to cook and that are capable of a change. If I talk about myself, I have two main reasons ethical and health related. "When I talk about ethical

reasons, I don't refer only to the way that the animals are treated to which I don't agree but also the fact that the meat and dairy industry represent the number one cause of pollution". "There are studies that show that even if in the next 5 years there would be no gas consuming vehicles the pollution would decrease with only 20%". Most of the remaining 80% is caused by the animal industry. And the examples go on: "87% of the plastic that is in the oceans and seas comes from fishing", "for a burger 800 litres of water are necessary", "I could go on with the examples because it is a topic I am passionate about, but I think it is obvious that this is the number one problem and the first one we should address in order to change the impact on the environment".

The huge impact on the environment is caused by the mass production and by the fact that the industry tries to maximise production and minimise the costs, so that the final product is cheap.

This causes companies to use antibiotics, growth hormones and other similar strategies that negatively impact the environment.

I think the best diet for the environment is the vegan one. If that is not possible, people should drastically reduce the amount of meat they eat to at most two times a week. The same is true for dairy and eggs and this is also the diet I use for my daughter. Another way in which I support sustainable choices is by supporting authors that talk about it in various ways. I buy their books, I recommend it to other and I talk about it but only with the people that ask me.

I think that "in the orthodox religion at least in Romana everything revolves around eating meat: at Easter people eat lamb, during Christmas they eat pork [...] and stuff like that".

If I think about specific foods and their link to the environment, I think that the best foods are sustainable fruits and vegetables. The problem I see with not organic fruits and vegetables is that people don't appreciate them and waste them. Also, the mass production of vegetables automatically implies that not all the products will be sold and some of it will be thrown away. The type of food that is the most detrimental to the environment, in my opinion, is fish because "the majority of the aquatic population has already been decimated". The most important factor that keep me from making sustainable choices is the lack of time. "Many times I get home from work, I notice that I don't have the necessary food to cook something, then I either order something, and don't know if it is sustainable, or I go to the nearest supermarket where I buy whatever I can find".

There is a resource that we don't have in Iasi and that would really help me make more sustainable choices. In some towns there are companies that, for a price cook your meals for the entire week using only controlled products and healthy cooking techniques. "That is a change I would make with my eyes closed". Another factor that negatively influences peoples' behaviours are the false or incomplete information from mass-media. For example, milk is described as being essential for healthy bones when in facts studies show that soy mild is better and contributes more to the calcium levels in the body and bone development. "One thing is to wish to eat healthier and more sustainable and another thing is to know, and have real information on how to do that."

Quotes

The main reason I am vegan are ethical reasons, but when I say ethical reasons, I don't refer only to the way that the animals are treated to which I don't agree but also the fact that the meat and dairy industry represent the number one cause of pollution.

Keywords

Vegan diet, pollution, organic vegetables, information, mass production

RL6_BE01, Belgium, Melissa's Adaptation to Belgian Food as a Lebanese-Syrian Refugee

Narrative

My name is Melissa and I am a 31-year-old woman of Armenian descent. My family and I used to live in Syria, but we left for Lebanon when the war broke out. When in 2020 the gigantic explosion happened in the port of Beirut, I was traumatised and left the country for Europe. I eventually moved to Belgium where I have been living in one of the bigger cities for 1.5 years, with my family also living in another Belgian city. I worked as a journalist in Lebanon and still do work for them from a distance, which gives me a small but liveable wage. At the same time, I am now studying fashion design in university and gradually learning Dutch. I participate in some volunteer projects: I am one of the riders for a bicycle taxi service and I am part of a cooking group that provides healthy and tasty meals to homeless people. I would describe myself as approximately 70% vegetarian, which means that I mostly eat vegetables and fruits. I do still eat meat sometimes, but this varies from twice a week to once every two weeks. I am not looking to become fully vegetarian, as I think my body needs certain nutrients that are mostly in meat. In Lebanon, I used to eat a lot more vegetables and fruits than I do now because of a couple of reasons. Firstly, it is more difficult for me to eat the same quantity of vegetables here because they taste differently from what I used to eat. In Lebanon, crops get more sun and less water, while in Belgium it is the opposite, which means that they are not as tasty here. What did surprise me was that certain vegetables are bigger here (like zucchinis or eggplants), but that doesn't make up for the downgrade in taste. Cost is also a very important factor; it costs a lot more to maintain healthy eating habits here than in Lebanon because prices are so much higher, maybe because half of the vegetables and fruits here actually come from other countries. Because of this, I use a less varied combination of vegetables when I cook dinner, opting instead for foods that are relatively cheap like

potatoes or chicken. I earn about €1300 per month and, after all other expenses, I only have about €200-250 left for groceries every month. I would be able to eat more vegetables if they were less expensive; for instance, I love lettuce salad and used to eat it daily with a noticeable positive effect on my skin. I eat it less frequently nowadays. I sometimes go to the Friday/Saturday market to buy stuff like fish that comes from more local producers, though I don't usually keep the season in mind for vegetables. Like other migrants, I often go to stores (and restaurants when I can) that are run by people from my country or wider region, like Turkish and Syrian stores. I try to buy my vegetables there as often as possible because they are more familiar to me, but they are expensive as they have to be flown over. You can see quite easily that they are not from here, as the shapes are different. What I also liked to do in Lebanon was watch TV and snack on green beans, whereas here I just eat potato chips. So in essence, it is easier to consume healthy foods in Lebanon than it is here, but I think that it is generally easier to choose for a healthy lifestyle here because the people and the government are more concerned with the environment and with the health of the people. As a result, you have more healthy choices to pick from (more bicycle riding, recycling, public transport), though for food the barrier remains money. From my volunteering at the cooking group, I've learned a lot of things: we use a lot of different fruits and vegetables, I've been introduced to new ways of working with certain ingredients (like Belgian endives) and it's turned me off of using meat somewhat, as I see that a lot of meat is just wasted in the cooking process of professional kitchens (we get leftover meat as a donation that would otherwise have been thrown away). One last thing that I am doing now that it isn't too cold yet is growing small spices and vegetables in little plant pots outside of my window. They are there for decoration purposes, but also so that I can use them in my cooking.

Quotes

The vegetables and fruits were tastier in Lebanon: they receive more sun and maybe less water. And that has a genuine effect on the soil. Here there's more water and less sun, and less sun means that it's less tasty.

In Lebanon [vegetables and fruits] were also cheaper. (...) If I want a healthier lifestyle here, I need to spend a lot more on that kind of food.

Keywords

Refugee, taste, price, cost, cooking group, mostly vegetarian



RL6_BE02, Belgium, Nathan's Environmental Awareness and Preference for Healthy Food

Narrative

My name is Nathan and I am a 20-year-old man living with my mother in a Belgian city. I have lived there my whole life, although I am half-Cuban via my father. My parents have separated and my father now lives in the United States. I am currently enrolled in a part-time educational curriculum at a local college for horticulture. Since I am studying, I have no income of my own and still live at home with my mother, who has a modest salary. For my studies, I am required to accumulate some experience as an intern/trainee/volunteer at a social organisation. My uncle is involved with a local cooking group that provides healthy meals to homeless people and I greatly respect him for his social engagement, which is why I joined the group. I'm happy that I did so, as the other volunteers are very nice. Other than that, my social life is a bit quiet nowadays and I spend a lot of time at home. My mother and I jointly decide what we eat and who takes care of the groceries. In general, we try to buy food that is more on the healthy side, but of course also food that we like the taste of (those two categories can overlap, but not all of the time). Because of this and despite our limited budget, I think we spend a little bit more than average on our food, as we buy biological food products a lot of the time. That includes many vegetables and fruits. What we do notice and regret, however, is that there is almost always plastic packaging and sometimes even double layers. We'd like to avoid this, but it's almost impossible. We mostly go to the supermarket and, once in a while, to the local butcher, though we don't eat much meat in general. If and when we do, it is more often than not chicken, though I eat a little bit more meat than my mother. I also eat fish now and then, but I think it's not that much more sustainable due to overfishing. At the moment, we don't really go to local markets anymore, though my mom used to quite often. She wants to start doing that again, but she stopped because it was a hassle to have to run around and go to different markets all the time when you could just go to the supermarket once a week and buy everything you need there. To compensate a little, we do buy as much biological food as possible, even though we know that's relative in supermarkets; it can come from farther away (outside of Belgium) even if it is biological. Kiwis, for instance, come from far away, which is a shame because I really like them and keep buying them. The market is not particularly more expensive than the supermarket, but there are a number of products that I can only get at the latter in any case. Some mass-produced foods also seem cheaper than more sustainable alternatives, and some are plainly just difficult to find sometimes. What we do try to do is buy in season: we know that the quality of a vegetable or fruit is not as good when it's out of season, so we avoid buying specific foods at specific times. When it comes to vegetarian or vegan diets, I really respect people who can commit to them and agree with their reasons, like animal cruelty or the climate impact. I couldn't do it myself though, as I need the protein from meat. At the moment I'm slacking off a little bit, but normally I do sports and workouts quite frequently, and I need protein to see any benefits in muscle mass. Apart from protein shakes, meat is just the most efficient when it comes to protein/calorie ratio. You need a little of both. I

also like the taste of the meats I still eat semi-regularly. I know that the vegetarian cuisine is very varied nowadays, but to me it still feels a bit boring to go for vegetarian food. Most of the direct alternatives to meat I don't really like, it's kind of hit or miss. I know about these things and about sustainability through the internet mainly - channels like Netflix or YouTube - although my mom is also interested in these kinds of topics so we talk about them sometimes. It's important to be balanced in this regard: being conscious of the world's problems is good, but you should not let them take over your life and mind.

Quotes

We are primarily concerned with healthy food, and of course food that we like to eat. I think that on average we spend a little bit more on biological products.

I'm not sure whether I could be fully vegetarian or vegan myself, but I do respect the people who do it. I know it's good for the climate.

Keywords

Low income, low meat consumption, biological food, markets, climate, taste

RL6_BE03, Belgium, April's Difficulties With Increasing Food Prices

Narrative

My name is April and I am a 52-year-old woman living with my husband and some of my children in a Belgian city. I have four children, of whom the two youngest still live with us (respectively, six and eighteen years old). I recently became a grandmother as well. During the day, I take care of the household and of my youngest child, but whenever I have the time I go to the nearby neighbourhood/community centre where I help out with all kinds of tasks. This is usually three days a week and sometimes on Friday if there's a special event. For example, every month a group of us volunteers cooks a nice and healthy meal for everyone who wants to show up. In doing so, we try to pay attention to using healthy ingredients that are not bad for the environment. In my daily life, money is the number one concern when I go to the supermarket: I try to buy the things that I like to eat (because they are tasty) and especially the foods that my youngest daughter is fond of, but sometimes I just don't have the money for it. Then I just buy whatever is cheapest.

To give an example, cat food has risen from about €1 to €3 in every store. The small grocery store near me is also becoming so expensive that I'm considering to not go there anymore; a carton of milk there now costs €1.40 instead of the €1 it costs in supermarkets. It is also specifically an issue with food: other products, like hair dye, have not become more expensive at all. I frequent a few supermarkets that are not too far to walk to, and I used to go to local markets on the street. Nowadays, however, I just don't have the time to go the Friday market anymore, although I still drink a coffee at the Farmer's Market once in a while (I don't buy any other food there though). What I often see in supermarkets is food labelled with stickers that say it is locally produced. Especially during Covid, I bought these kinds of products, as we were told that the local economy needed to be supported. With the increased prices of today, I can't keep that up and I usually go for stuff like pizzas or lasagne. I've also heard of food that is sustainable - it's something that's becoming more well-known I think - but the only thing I really know about it is that it uses less energy somehow. I often see products that are labelled 'Belgian', but that don't have a 'sustainable' label or indication, which makes me doubt whether local is really good or not. Before all of these price increases, I used to be able to come up with a well-thought-out menu for the last few days of the month, with whatever money we still had left over. Such a menu would consist of potatoes, some healthy vegetables and a good piece of meat or fish. But now we have to settle for cheaper stuff, and we're eating less meat as a result. I am definitely a meat-eater, though, that is not something anyone can take away from me. I respect other people's choices, but I would never choose to go vegetarian. Although I recently got a few vegetarian burgers from the food bank and they tasted basically like chicken-burgers, so that was pretty good. It doesn't mean I'd switch to vegetarian, but I know that I would've never even tried a thing like this in the past and now I do eat vegetarian alternatives from time to time.

Quotes

I once was given a pack of veggie-burgers at the food bank. I wasn't going to decline any help that was given me, so I took it home and prepared it. It was surprisingly good. (...) We now eat those kinds of things.

I can still buy my hair dye at the same price as a year ago, but the food I actually need to get to the next day now costs more.

Keywords

Food bank, low income, high prices, local, Covid, taste, community centre



RL6_BE04, Belgium, Yvette's Early Rural Life and Difficult City Life

Narrative

My name is Yvette and I am a 73-year-old woman living on my own in an apartment in a Belgian city. I have four daughters. I grew up in the countryside, where we had our own small farm. Later on, I moved to the city to be with my now ex-husband. In general, I've had a sad life: my ex-husband used to beat me, I have seriously contemplated suicide five separate times and two of my daughters don't speak to me anymore. Luckily, I still regularly see the other two daughters. Going to the community centre has also cheered me up a lot, as I can do some volunteer work here and be among other people. I usually have one hot meal a day, in the evening. I rarely cook for myself and I usually rely on my daughter: she cooks at her home for her family and makes sure to prepare enough for me as well, after which she brings it over to me. This is only the case, however, when she has an early shift at work, not when she works late. She tries to use fresh ingredients that are often healthy and don't contain a lot of fats: potatoes, cauliflower, chicken, ... Apart from my daughter's meals, I don't really eat meat anymore. I sometimes go to the supermarket myself, which is not easy with my weak knees and as I'm getting older, and I only buy a select number of things: mostly protein products (like drinks) and fruits (like tangerines, oranges). I also need to keep an eye on my pension, which is usually enough to cover what I want to buy as long as I pay attention. For example, there are bananas that are more expensive than others and, in that case, I go for the cheapest ones. For me there's no noticeable difference in taste, bananas are bananas. The other kinds of food (mostly vegetables and meat) are covered by what my daughter makes. I can't really go anywhere else like markets that are a bit farther away, because my knees prevent me from getting on and off buses. To cover the days that my daughter can't make food for me, I take some leftovers with me from the community centre. I don't really have the money for eating out and I don't like it either: more often than not I've seen things in restaurants that disgust me, like reusing food that was left over by previous visitors. I don't really cook anymore, because I have the annoying issue that my appetite disappears whenever I'm making a meal. I do think about the green aspect of food, as I grew up on a small farm. Back then, we were able to grow and eat our own vegetables, which seems a lot more healthy than buying it in plastic packaging from the supermarket. There was also a lot less waste. I would like to go back there and produce my own food again, but I know that it is not possible anymore with my physical condition. It would also create a lot more problems for me, like finding out ways of getting around or being able to see my daughters as frequently as I do now. In terms of food waste, I see some bad things here in the city too. There used to be a store around here that threw away its food in a dumpster every few days, even if the food was still good to eat. Some people who desperately needed it took stuff out of the container, but then the owners called the police. I think it'd just be better if you give those kinds of things to people in need rather than throwing it away.

Quotes

I liked living in that little town and could help out with the farming work. It felt satisfying to eat your own work.

Maybe three or four times a week, my daughter brings me a self-prepared meal. Without it, I would have a lot more difficulties in getting through the week.

Keywords

Rural childhood, community centre, help from others, disability, low pension

RL6_BE05, Belgium, Elisabeth's Rural Ambitions and Limited Finances

Narrative

My name is Elisabeth and I am a 55-year-old woman living in a rural village not far from a bigger Belgian city. I live on my own and I have three children, who have all moved out. I have a muscle disease, so normal days consist of a lot of pain for me and I often stay home. I get a compensation from the state. On good days, I do come here to volunteer and help out, as I used to live in this neighbourhood a year ago. Back then, I decided to move back to the village I grew up in, as the kids had all left the house. As for food, I buy a lot of products in the supermarket, but usually only the cheapest ones. Whatever I feel like on a given day, I buy; that includes meat and vegetables, though I don't eat fruit. I don't really pay attention to where those products all come from, but I probably should. What counts for me right now is taste and price, which is why I don't go the little neighbourhood shops. I have a weekly budget of €75 for groceries, so it's impossible to go there. I do go to local markets sometimes, as they can be cheaper for both meat and vegetables. A vegetarian diet is not for me, though I think it's a good thing that more people are becoming vegetarian. And when I'm offered a vegetarian meal, I eat without any complaints. Here at the community centre, we actually never make meals that include meat and they taste fine. It's just a childhood habit of mine to eat meat; my dad kept pigs on our farm and so we ate meat almost every day. As for vegetables, I live next to a farmer and once he's cultivated and taken the potatoes that he needs, I have permission to take some potatoes from his field as well. I'm actually thinking of growing my own vegetables, like leeks, celery, cauliflower and red cabbage. I don't have the land for it myself, but the farmer is willing to rent out a space on his field. I'd use those vegetables in

my own cooking, but also share them with the neighbours. I was inspired to do that by someone living close to me who did the exact same thing, but he had a heart attack and so I want to continue the tradition. When I was still living in the city, they were actually trying to set up little vegetable gardens around my neighbourhood. However, nobody - including me - was really willing to start cultivating crops because there was just too little space. It's also not the right area to grow food; after a while, they wouldn't be vegetable gardens but marijuana gardens. I try to not waste too much food and I never buy anything I don't eat afterwards. I actually saw this tip on TV that you can eat the leaves of cauliflowers as well, so I try to make soup out of them instead of throwing them away like I used to.

Quotes

I want to have a little plot of land where I can start growing leeks, celery, cauliflower, red cabbage, ... (...) I want to take over the torch from a nice neighbour of ours that used to do the same thing.

I wish I could go to the little neighbourhood shops still, because it's just easier for me. But they've become so much more expensive than the normal stores that I can't justify it anymore.

Keywords

Rural, growing crops, childhood, taste, low income, disability

RL6_BE06, Belgium, Harold's Childhood Eating Patterns and Considerations on Sustainability

Narrative

My name is Harold and I am a 59-year-old man. I have three children with my ex-wife, who have all left the house, and I live on my own. I frequently stay with my partner though (or vice versa). I am on burnout leave and get an allowance from my health insurance fund, which is enough to cover what I need. I grew up with a food consumption pattern during my childhood that I still largely adhere to out of habit nowadays: typical Flemish farmers' meals, which include seasonal vegetables, meat or fish, and a lot of potatoes.

Because potatoes can increase your weight a lot, I've started substituting some alternatives the past few years like rice or tabbouleh. My choices for vegetables vary according to the season, as their supply is bigger in stores when they are in season, and I only sporadically pick up something more exotic. I'm not a big fruit eater, though, just strawberries and tangerines. I think it's also important that food is locally produced, so I do look out for that. It surprises me that there is actually a relatively limited supply of local vegetables in stores, unless we're talking about 'forgotten' vegetables like turnips and parsnips. Belgian products that are usually available include cabbage, beans and Belgian endives, but that's about it. If you look closely at packaged vegetables that you would think are typical winter vegetables for Belgium, they are actually from abroad: green beans come from Ethiopia, or recently I had a little package of vegetables from Morocco. I don't have a problem with that in principle: I think the quality of harvesting is probably the same, but they do have to go over long distances to come here. More and more in supermarkets lately (though still limited), they do put little Belgian flags on products that were locally produced, like carrots. That's more for advertising purposes by big agro-companies so that they can sell more than for sustainability purposes I think. But if they would guide me, the customer, more towards those kinds of products, I think I would buy more locally. I go to local markets too, but I think they can be misleading. Given that there is no packaging, you'd think that it is from around here, but the wholesalers where people with market stalls go for their products are also importing a lot of their products. I think the barrier to entry for farmer's markets around here is a bit too high. They only have very specific times that their stalls are present each week and you often have to order online in advance. I am averse to doing anything online or on the computer, so that doesn't work for me. The only place where you can really be sure is the bio-stores, but they are a bit more expensive of course. I know of one that is run as a cooperative that works together with farmers just outside the city. I went there for a while, but I can't do that on my income currently. You notice it immediately: a basket of food products there would cost almost as much as a whole cart in a normal supermarket. But even when I go to the supermarket I need to pay attention to how much I spend: I buy the non-brand alternatives as much as possible, also for canned vegetables like beans and peas. I don't notice a difference in quality anyways. When I was a kid, we had all kinds of carts passing by the house to sell food products: vegetable cart, the brewer's cart, the local fishmonger, ... This happened on fixed days of the week and I assume it was locally produced. That doesn't exist anymore, but I don't remember going to the supermarket often as a child, because we were able to get almost everything from them. That also influenced greatly what we actually ate: I never ate spaghetti as a child for instance, that was never on one of those carts and my mom never made that (it wasn't in her big recipe book from the local farmers' union). When I think about sustainable food, I think of meals with no meat or with meat replacements, or food that doesn't use a lot of water to produce. I think it's strange that we eat strawberries from Israel, for instance: we have them here too, just not the whole year long. I think it's not too much of a sacrifice to only eat strawberries in the summer and then just wait until the next summer comes along. But to change your eating habits on your own is very difficult I think. It'd be easier if your whole family makes the switch at the same time and if you talk about it a lot beforehand. I do use meat replacements and other alternatives now in my cooking, but it's on a more sporadic basis. I think they taste nice a lot of the time, tofu also. I think this change came to be by talking with a lot of the people I know and being influenced by their way of eating. I think it would

be a good thing if there were policies that prohibited certain foods during certain seasons. I wouldn't cross the border to just eat strawberries. Take a sugar tax, for instance: I love sugar and sodas, but if there's just less supply of it, I think that would help for people's health and I wouldn't be against it. Same principle for non-sustainable food.

Quotes

I was given a food pattern in my youth by my parents raising me, and that food pattern recurs regularly.

I never ate spaghetti in my youth. Where did you buy that? It wasn't on one of the carts that came by our house, but it probably was in the big Carrefour and we almost never went there.

Keywords

Childhood eating pattern, biological food, sustainable, low income, locally produced

RL6_BE07, Belgium, Peter's Commitment to Vegetarianism From a Young Age Onwards

Narrative

My name is Peter and I am a 56-year-old man living together with my husband and - during the weekends - my 18-year-old foster son. My partner and I have been together for 25 years and have been taking care of our foster son for about two years now, after his mother passed away. I work in social services and we have a small business where we rent out a room in our house as a B&B-type experience. As for food, my partner and I both eat vegetarian and we usually go to the same supermarket (Colruyt) that has a pretty good selection of affordable biological products (sometimes local as well). We might have a relatively monotone food consumption pattern because we don't eat any meat and we often buy the same kinds of products. We go to the Oxfam store sometimes to buy Fair Trade products, though some of them are also available in regular stores. This would be Fair Trade coffee, bananas, products like that. We don't buy vegetables and fruits that come from outside of Europe, unless they have the Fair Trade brand. That's a bit of a shame, because there are plenty of tasty foods that are imported here. We do pay some attention to season as well, but I'm not terribly knowledgeable about which crops are best

to buy in each season. I know that apples are in season right now, for instance, but not much else. It's usually my partner who does the cooking in our house, although we mostly decide together what we will eat on a given day. For a time we bought some food from a food market in the city, which is run by farmers from relatively close by (but still based outside of city boundaries). They would offer a package of different food products that you could order beforehand and we were quite happy with what was included. Coincidentally, we have recently been discussing to take that up again, but we stopped for two reasons: we moved a bit farther away from where we used to live, so the distance to the food market is greater now, and it proved difficult to find the time to go, as both my partner and I had working hours during the time the market was open. As for the cost of our vegetarian diet, I think that it is actually cheaper a lot of the time than a meat-based diet, as long as you pay some attention to your food patterns and you don't buy literally everything biological. Looking at the prices of meat, unless you're eating minced meat every day it makes a big difference to not eat any meat. Even with our purchases of Fair Trade products it is only a euro or two more expensive and, from my experience at the social service, I know that households often buy comfort foods like candy, potato chips or soda that take a similar amount of money to purchase. So if you cut those out like we do, there is no real impact on your budget. With regard to nutrients, I think that people can be misinformed about the impact of a vegetarian diet. It is perfectly possible to have a balanced and healthy food pattern in terms of proteins, minerals, vitamins, ... Vitamin B12 gets brought up sometimes, but that is added to the soy products we consume; for protein we eat eggs. I regularly test my blood and the results are always perfectly fine. I think that it's actually eating the wrong meats that can have a negative impact on your health. As a child and early teenager, I of course grew up with meat and a lot of dairy products, which were supposed to make you strong. I still consume some dairy products, so I think that's a leftover from my childhood. For the rest, we ate as many fresh vegetables as possible, as opposed to canned goods, and that's also stayed with me. We already went to the Oxfam store back then as well and my sister now works at one too. There's always been a connection between my family and the Green party and that general environmental commitment has stayed with me. I made the shift to a vegetarian diet for ideological reasons: animal welfare and the impact a meat-based diet has on the climate were the biggest reasons for me. I felt a lot better when I stopped eating meat. I made the switch when I read a book on animal rights and environmentalism in university, but when I met my partner he was not vegetarian yet. We discussed it in the early stages of our relationship and we agreed to eat vegetarian at home, though he will eat meat sometimes when we go out to a restaurant. I am also flexible when meeting with friends and if there is no alternative, I will eat meat too. I think it would be a lot more difficult if my husband didn't join me in this vegetarianism. Despite us both being functionally vegetarian, we do still buy meat from time to time because of our foster son, who has a severe form of autism. It is already very difficult to get him to eat food – apart from his comfort foods – in the first place, so whenever he is with us we do buy some meat for dinner like chicken or toppings for his sandwiches like turkey meat, even though the latter disgusts me a little. This is usually only in the weekends, as during the week he is at an institution for people with his condition.

Quotes



Food... vegetables and fruits from outside of Europe we don't buy, even though they're sometimes really tasty.

Is it a tradition? [I don't know, but] we grew up at home going to the Oxfam store and my sister works at one now. (...) The family is linked in a way to the Green party.

Keywords

Environmental family, childhood, vegetarian, LGBTQ, foster son, farmer's market, Fair Trade

RL6_BE08, Belgium, Samuel's Radical Change of Diet After His Diabetes Diagnosis

Narrative

My name is Samuel and I am a 49-year-old man living together with my wife and two adolescent children. I was born in Ethiopia and moved to Belgium during a time of great conflict. I have been here for about 25 years now. I work at a furniture retailer and am passionate about music, getting income from both. I've been very diligent about my food for about two years now, but I wasn't really conscious about it before that. Two years ago I went to the doctor, who warned me about my blood sugar levels being too high: I was pre-diabetic. That's when I realised how much food can have an influence on your health, especially if you're already over 40-45 years old. After a while, I was effectively diagnosed with type-2 diabetes and had to take medication for it. I went to a nutritionist who guided me in how I should eat, though their first rounds of advice did not help and were almost harmful, prescribing foods that I was medically prohibited from eating. That's when I started doing more of my own research and I started eating a low-carbohydrates diet. This also included low amounts of fat, some protein here and there, and a lot of vitamins. In practice this meant a lot more vegetables and a lot less processed meats, though still some meat products that are not processed. Processed foods of all kinds have no place in my diet anymore whatsoever. When I started eating like this, I saw positive changes fairly quickly and felt a lot better. I went from having to take three to four pills per day to being declared free from diabetes. Right now I have very low blood sugar levels and I am cured of diabetes. In those two years, I have lost 14kg of weight and I feel really well. I also engage in intermediate fasting, because it's not just important what you eat but also when you eat: it influences your hormonal balance. What I usually do is not eat any breakfast and just go straight to work. For lunch, I eat about 50% vegetables, 25% healthy fats (avocado, olives, etc.) and 25% proteins (mostly meat). Finally, I often eat dinner early

around 6PM, which means that I only eat within a timespan of about six hours. As a result, my body doesn't have to digest anything for a period of almost 18 hours and it has to expend less energy overall. This is difficult in the beginning and it has to be built up, but you get used to it after some time. It also aligns more with how humans used to live 10,000 years ago. My conclusion is that our bodies are just not made to eat four or five times a day. When you eat only twice a day, when you are genuinely hungry, a lot of food just tastes better as well. I've also simply forgotten the taste of carbohydrates and of sugar at this point, so I have no desire to return. Before I got my diagnosis, I would eat sandwiches with meat or cheese in the morning, which contain lots of carbohydrates. By lunch, I would be hungry again and often eat some pasta or rice, and between dinner and lunch I'd eat small snacks as well. I ate a bit more meat back then, but not that much more. I definitely eat more vegetables now: even though they still have some carbohydrates, they contain a lot of fibre as well and you still feel satisfied after eating. The diabetes didn't come out of nowhere of course: as a teen and when I grew up some more I had very bad eating habits, eating a lot of sugars and carbohydrates. In Ethiopia, I did eat fewer processed foods, more locally grown vegetables and fresh meat or fish from nearby, but when I came to Europe everything was packaged and contained lots of sugar. Whenever I go to the supermarket now, I go to very specific aisles: as many biological vegetables as possible, eggs and (biological) meat, but no packaged foods whatsoever. I go for biological vegetables because I want them to be cultivated in a natural and healthy way (i.e., no pesticides). This also started from the moment I looked out for my health. Moreover, I only eat certain low-sugar fruits in season, as I am of the opinion that the availability of all kinds of fruits throughout the year introduces too much sugar into our system. I keep to a natural rhythm and I won't eat grapes in winter for example. For vegetables I don't really look at season. I did try a vegan diet for a while, but you start missing some essential nutrients after some time – like vitamin B12 – and I noticed a lack of energy. So after a few months, I switched back to a diet with meat. I am concerned about the environment and the climate, so I do go to work by bike whatever the weather. For food though, it is my personal health that has precedence over all else.

Quotes

About two months ago, I went for a medical check-up and my blood sugar levels were as good as those of a young guy of 18 or 19 years old.

[I buy biological vegetables] because they are sprayed with few pesticides, because they are more naturally grown. That is really good for your body.

Keywords

Health concerns, diabetes, biological food, intermediate fasting, low carbohydrates

RL6_BE09, Belgium, Ingrid's 30-Year-Long Vegetarianism and Environmental Concern

Narrative

My name is Ingrid and I am a 49-year-old woman who is living alone in an apartment in the city. I currently have no partner and I have no children. I work as a kindergarten teacher. To begin with, I inherited my attention for food and the environment from my parents: my mother consciously bought certain food products because she wanted us to eat healthily, though that also meant traditional fare like potatoes, vegetables and stews were served often. I became a vegetarian at 16, mostly because of compassionate reasons like preventing animal suffering. We lived in a village outside the city at the time and our neighbours had some cows in their yard that I hung around with; I found it sad that they would be killed to end up on our plates. I didn't know a whole lot else about vegetarianism back then, as it was a time that there were only little vegetarian alternatives. Whenever we went for a dinner party at a family member's place, I was always the odd one out in terms of my dietary preferences, but sometimes people were a bit jealous after they saw the unique meal I received instead. Over time, people have come to regard vegetarianism as normal pretty much everywhere, probably because it's more prevalent in media. Other reasons for being vegetarian came into view for me after a while too, when I realised how much of a positive impact it actually had on issues like the climate and the environment. I don't really remember how I came to know about those other impacts, but maybe I read some books about vegetarianism at the time that mentioned it. My decision to change diets gradually changed what we ate at home too, especially after my father developed heart problems. That is when we started eating a more Mediterranean diet, with some vegetarian touches. I did compensate in the beginning by consuming more dairy products, as it had a slightly negative effect on my cholesterol. But in terms of taste, I never really missed meat. Only the last few years, I've been wondering whether I shouldn't eat a little bit of meat sometimes, but the idea is still icky to me. I don't know where that impulse comes from precisely, but I do suffer from an iron deficiency and my body might be trying to tell me something. I also had a partner a few years back and they were a very good cook, so the idea of being 'flexitarian' appealed a bit more to me. Also when you travel to other regions, the idea of vegetarianism might be strange to some people or cultures. But since my body is not used to eating meat at all anymore, it's probably difficult to switch back to a diet with meat included. The choice to be vegetarian is very decisive for what you buy and eat of course, with products and meals generally being healthier. Those reasons are why I mostly buy biological products as well as local and seasonal foods. To give an example, I won't buy blueberries if they had to be flown over by plane to get here. Now that food has become a bit more expensive, I do sometimes go for some other products like cheese as well, though since I live on my own it doesn't usually matter all that much whether I go for a slightly more expensive vegetable over another. I don't think biological food is that much more expensive and it's still sold at a quite democratic price. Taste is the most important factor for me, I won't eat something that I don't like. And it turns out that I like unprocessed or

unaltered foods the best, though I will still buy products that I like but that are not biological. More than 10 years ago, I started eating fish again as well; due to genetic reasons, I'm also susceptible to cholesterol problems like my father and a doctor told me I had to balance my levels by taking in more 'good fats'. So once in a while I eat a piece of fish and the taste is okay. Because I don't eat any meat, I go more often to 'nature food stores', where you know for certain that everything is biological, and in other supermarkets the supply of biological food has also increased. If I see that the quality of vegetables is good in ordinary supermarkets, I'll probably buy them, though I wouldn't buy green beans from India for instance. When I go to the biological stores, I just take whatever I need without looking at the product information cards because I know that those stores are also concerned about shorter supply chains. But it's no effort for me personally to go to a lot of different food stores, as I like shopping for food and following my gut feeling, so I'm fine with going the extra mile for both biological and qualitative food. I won't always go for biological food though, since there is sometimes a specifically Belgian alternative without plastic packaging. That's not always very easy to find, but I do dislike it when vegetables are in plastic packaging. On the other hand, I'm not very fanatical about packaging either; I don't go to the store where you have to bring your own boxes because they don't use packaging. I am surprised sometimes by how little some of my colleagues care about the environment and all these ways they can have an impact in their daily lives, but everyone is different I guess.

Quotes

I started eating vegetarian when I was 16, which was because of compassion with other animal species. That was the first reason. And of course, other reasons popped up once I realised that what I was doing had a positive impact [on the environment].

It's not always easy to buy food without packaging. (...) But vegetables packaged in plastic I find very annoying [to see].

Keywords

Vegetarian diet, local products, seasonal, packaging, childhood, animal welfare, health

RL6_BE10, Belgium, Michael's Vegetarian Tendencies and Family Preferences

Narrative

My name is Michael and I am a 51-year-old man living alone in a Belgian village. I used to live in a bigger city, I am self-employed and I have a partner that lives separately from me.

I have two children aged 12 and 14 years old, and I am in a co-parenting arrangement with my ex-wife, where the kids are with her for one week and then they're with me the other week. When the kids are with me, our menu is determined to a strong degree by my youngest son, who is quite a picky eater. It's very difficult to get him to eat new foods that he hasn't tried before, so our dinners usually consist of food like mashed potatoes, chicken or sausages, some vegetables like carrots, ... The vegetables are usually worked into the mashed potatoes, but there are some vegetables that are non-starters for him like Belgian endives or Brussels sprouts. We eat meat in small portions though, not like when I was a child. Back then, it was normal for each person to get a big piece of meat on their plate, but I avoid that with my children. They are more likely to get half a chicken filet on their plate. I gradually evolved away from my childhood eating patterns and when I was still married to my ex-wife – before the children were born – we ate a lot more plant-based foods. So it's not like I'm unaware of vegetarian alternatives, but because of the issues that I've had with my youngest they have mostly disappeared into the background. Ever since my divorce, I've been living close to my parents and I worked long and hard for a long time. That's when my mother usually cooked for me and the children, which made dinner more traditional again. When the kids are not with me, I'm usually with my partner, who almost always cooks for us. If I had to cook for just myself more often, I would go for more vegetarian meals, as I don't really need to eat meat, but right now that rarely happens. I did buy some tofu for myself recently, but I know that my son would never want to eat that, so that doesn't happen often. My partner also typically prepares more 'gastronomic' meals: he works with a lot of butter and with large portions of meat, though I always tell him that's not necessary for me. I will soon move a bit farther away again from my parents and I'm thinking of being more active and creative then with vegetarian alternatives, within the confines of what my youngest child finds tasty of course. When I go to the supermarket for groceries, I try to buy more biological products. Sometimes more local products as well, but that's not something I actively look out for right now, even though the supply of local goods is increasing. I do try to take season into account, buying (mostly) vegetables when they're in season. Luckily, there's also a bio-store close to where I live and I go there often now. That was not always the case, which meant that if we wanted biological products we had to go the next town over. Now it's a lot easier to buy biological products and I even buy my meat there sometimes. As for packaging, I know that there are stores in bigger cities where you can just bring your own containers and avoid any packaging whatsoever. If those kinds of stores were around here, I would definitely go there. But what I do now in the store is just put loose vegetables in little cotton bags from the store itself, avoiding any plastic. I'm also convinced that it would be better for the planet – and for animal wellbeing of course – if we as a species could stop eating meat. It's something that I do think about, but in practice I still need to jump through a lot of hoops to make that happen personally. At the very least, I don't think I would miss the taste of meat that much, because I know that the meat alternatives are quite tasty. I would still be open to eating meat in a restaurant once in a while though. Going vegan would be tough, however, as I really like cheese and eggs. Maybe if there are enough viable replacements.

Quotes

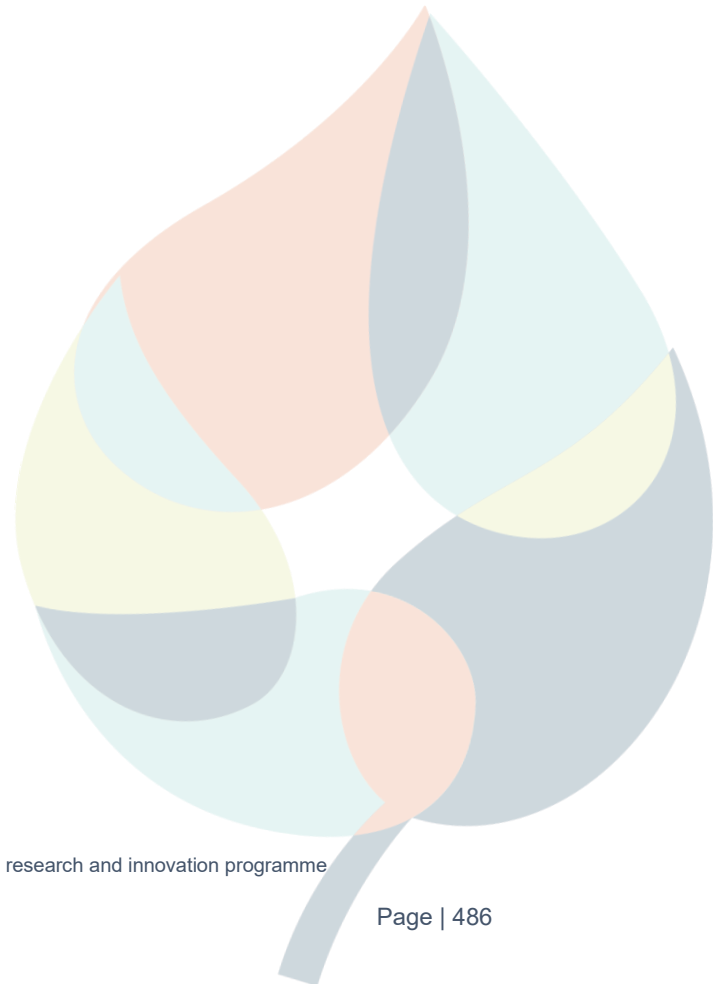


There are definitely [vegetarian] alternatives, but right now I don't put a lot of effort into offering those to my children, as my youngest is too critical.

I definitely try to buy biological [food] and I also try local... But that's probably not as pronounced as biological.

Keywords

Vegetarian tendencies, picky child, single father, packaging, biological products



Research Line 7: Transport poverty and sustainable travel: families in socially vulnerable areas

RL7_RO01, Romania, Comfort in transport

Narrative

I am from a family with three members, an adult and three children. I'm a single mother. My children are in the preparatory class and in the second class, at the same school, in our village. We live in a small village, the first locality on the way out of the city of a North-Eastern city of Romania, a locality with almost 7000 inhabitants. For transportation, usually, I use my personal car. In a regular day of the week, I take the children to school in the morning and I pick them up in the afternoon, after the after-school program. I use my car both in the morning and in the after-noon. Sometimes I go to the office in the city, after I leave the children at the school, but sometimes, I work at the school for half a day. Thus, I stay at school until the end of my program, and then also by car, I go home to eat. I prefer to have the car so I can get home quickly, eat and then leave, for example, in the city, at the cabinet or in other places, for other classes (I teach yoga class). I drive into town, maybe do some shopping before I go back, pick up the kids from after-school and go home. Sometimes in the evening, we walk in our area, for pleasure or for small shopping at a local market. If I have other things to do in other places that are at a distance of let's say half an hour's walk, I take the car.

I thought maybe I'm a lazy person because I prefer personal car and not walking when I take my children to school. We stay very close to the school for a distance of 10 minutes and we could walk. Not in every day, but sometimes I have to go to town and I think that it doesn't have any sense to take the children to the school by walking, then returning home and taking my car to go in the town. I try to analyse a little bit why wouldn't I do that although I have the possibility. I realise that it would be beneficial from several reasons, like saving fuel, improving health for me and my kids. The reason I don't do this consist on the fact that I haven't implemented this habit in my routine. As a child I walked to school every day and this was not a problem. I did not have a car in my family when I was a child. I use my car because it's a habit and also because I have the impression that I'm gaining time. Now I realise that I'm giving something else in return. If I were to not use

my car, I would gain a lot of things. Using bicycles or a scooter would be a little difficult, because there is a slope in our way to school. But we can walk. On winter, for example, I'm thinking about how long does it take to get the car out of the parking lot. I remember now that one day this week I worked from home and I was walking to pick up my children from school, in the after-noon. I took my children and also a little boy that lives in our area of blocks, and this walk was so pleasant, because it was an opportunity for me to observe them and to talk.

I don't use other transportation options (e.g., public transportation) because of the habit of using the car and gaining time. I don't have other reasons. We are close to the bus station on the main street, but it's more complicated compared to using personal car, that offers us more comfort. I chose this apartment, where we stay, because it is close to the Bus station, but we never take the bus for going in the city. Using the bus is not something I reject, but it's more comfortable to get in the car and go where I want. The school bus is not yet a solution for me because I think it's safer to go with my children to school. But I take into account the possibility to walk with them in the morning. The benefits of doing this should be more powerful than my perception that the car offers more comfort. The main benefits imply improving physical health, fresh air, connectivity with the nature, observing the environment, human connection between us.

I don't know particular difficulties in terms of transportation, when I'm thinking about my personal situation. It's comfortable for me to drive, I have enough experience and I am an organised person, therefore the traffic does not create me problems. However, a difficulty may consist in the mental effort necessary for driving and the necessity to regulate my emotions. I realise that if I were to choose another means of transport, I would like to do some things that I can't do otherwise. But for me, using the car is the easier way and I don't even think at other possibilities. However, if I would live in the city, maybe it would be more changes to use public transportation, because there are many options. In my situation, I don't even think about finding another solution. In my family, my daughter clearly prefers the car. She enjoys walking, but she prefers the car.

My other friends also use the car in the city. On the other hand, my neighbours don't have a car and they walk or use public transportation (even families with children). So I could say that I have both types of examples. In my childhood and in adolescence, I walked a lot and I'm wondering why didn't I kept this habit. I still have periods when I walk either alone or with someone or with my children, but usually alone. Maybe it was hard for me because I went to a school that was not in the neighbourhood, I had to wait for the bus in the morning or walk a long distance. It was hard for a bit and now I don't want, for example, my children to have similar hard times.

Quotes

I have the impression that I am gaining time in this way [using the car], but I realise now that I am losing something else.

It is more comfortable to get in the car, which I have at my disposal, and to go where I need, than to go to the station and wait.

I realise the mental effort you make behind the wheel, including the fact of controlling your emotion.

Keywords

Car, comfort, children, time, safety, habit

RL7_RO02, Romania, Time first, pollution second

Narrative

I am a 36-year-old woman and I live in a small village in the north-eastern region of Romania, in a family with three members and a temporary member, my mother. She stays with us only when my child is sick and need to stay at home. I live with my husband and my daughter of 5 years old. In most of the time, for transportation, we use our personal cars (we have two cars). In a regular day of the week, in the morning, I go with my daughter at kinder-garden. I work in the same kinder-garden, in the same building. I am teacher for kinder-garden children. Most of the time, we go with my car, but we also walk when the weather is fine, in the warm season. In the morning, my husband goes to his job with his car. At noon, we came back home, me and my daughter, and, usually, we stay at home for the rest of the day. My husband came back home in the evening. In most of the days, we don't have other transportation necessities in a day. The kinder-garden and our jobs are the main reasons we use our cars. However, in weekend, we have more transportation necessities, for shopping and various activities for children or for leisure. The most comfortable transportation for us is personal car, also in the weekend. In our locality, we have public transportation, but the hours are not convenient for us. In the morning, for example, a quarter of an hour after my little girls usually wakes up, we need to be in the bus. For using the bus, she need to weak up more earlier in the morning. I don't even consider this option. My husband rarely uses the public transportation. It's not impossible for him and he doesn't reject this possibility, but the hour is also a problem. Not in the morning, but when he returns home. Sometimes he need to stay after his program at his job, and in this situation he can miss the bus. The frequency is one bus in an hour. Therefore, if he misses a bus, he need to wait another hour. The time is more important for us than the pollution, therefore we prefer the car.

In our free time, usually in the weekend, we use our car to get somewhere, from where we took public transport or we walk if the weather is fine. In the weekend, we use to walk for 30 minutes, even an hour in our village. In the moment, we don't use bicycles, because my daughter doesn't know how to use bicycles. When she will grow up and she will learn, we will use the bikes, even to go to kindergarten.

For shopping, we use a lot online services, because we can save time. We make the orders online and receive the products at home. Sometimes, we use the market from

our village and in this case, we use the car, especially when we have more products to buy.

One of my main problem with transportation consists on the lack of parking places. When I worked in the city, the lack of parking was a bigger problem. I can also mention the stress of being at the wheel, in traffic. Driving is not very relaxing regardless where you drive. Certainly is more stressing than using public transportation.

I would use public transportation if the buses would be more frequent. I don't have a big problem with the agglomeration and even with the fact that they would not be very clean. After all, you use them to get from point A to point B and that's it. If the buses in our village would be more frequent, I would definitely use them. A main reason for this consists on saving fuel.

Around me, my friends, my neighbours also use personal cars. This is the main way of transportation used around me. The infrastructure is a main problem for my colleagues. Some of my colleagues begin to use the bus, instead of walking, because the streets in our village are narrow and we don't have sidewalks. It's very distressing to walk on the same street as the cars and to hear them all the time. This is especially a problem when you also have children with you. For this reason, using the bus is a solution. However, for me this is not a problem. I can walk despite these difficulties, because I often use less trafficked side streets. In the past, when I was a child, I walked a lot. When I was in the high school, in the last year, I had the possibility to use the car, after I got my driver's license. However, although the distance was not so short, I always preferred to walk. Later, in faculty, I also walked from my home to the university every day. When we moved here, in this locality, and I worked in the city, I excluded the possibility to walk. Now, that I work in our locality, I have this option and I want to try to use it often. At the beginning of the school year, in September, for almost two weeks, we walked through the kindergarten, me and my daughter. We had a wonderful time spent together, we admired the nature, we saw flowers. In my family, we love walking, all of us. Therefore, the change I want to make in my situation concerning mobility consists on using less frequently personal car and walk more often.

I don't think we have a lot of influence on reduction the pollution by not using our personal cars. The very old buses pollute much more than small cars. So first of all, the institutions should fix this problem concerning public transportation. We don't have very old cars and I don't think that the main problem is caused by us, by using the cars. Public transportation relies a lot on old buses and after my opinion, a bus is more polluting than ten cars. However, it's worth trying something.

Quotes

The most convenient for us is going by car.

Time is more precious than pollution.

We are used to the comfort of the personal car.

We don't pollute that much. (...) but it's worth trying to do something.

Keywords

Walk, car, time, connecting, nature

RL7_RO03, Romania, The absence of civilization in public transport

Narrative

I am the mother of a 7-year-old girl. We live together, just me and my daughter. We live in a locality on the way out of a north-eastern city from Romania. Usually, I use my personal car for daily transportation necessities. I live very close to the first bus station from the city. However, to get there, I have to cross an unpleasant area (Păcureț, a street with inhabitants of another ethnicity) and I prefer to use my car, for safety reasons. From my village, from the place I live, there is no public transportation to the town. The only option is to walk to the first bus station. I tried to buy an eco-car, to pollute as little as possible. In a regular day of a week, I begin the day by taking my daughter to the school. Recently, her school moved in a new building very close to my house and we have the possibility to walk. It's a distance of 10 minutes walking. In the past, we didn't have this option, because the distance was bigger and we always used the car. Now, we walk in days with a fine weather. If it's a raining day or if we hurry, we take the car. Actually, three days out of five, we use the car. I let her at the school. If I need to go to my office in the city, I go with my car at the office. If I can work from home in that day, I go home with the car. When I need to take my daughter from the school, I have the same options: the car or walking. Usually, I use the car. When I need to go in the town for other reasons, for shopping or extra-school activities, we always use my car. In three days on the week, we have activities in the town, after the school program. The time pressure is the main obstacle for using other options. It's more efficient to use the car, to go from one place to another. The public transportation is not very clean and I am not excited to use them. If public transportation would be politer, I would use it. Sometimes, we used the tram, but just to show my daughter different options, for an educational purpose. Moreover, the life rhythm does not allow me to wait and to use public transportation. However, after the school moved in my area, I seriously considered to possibility to walk. I could also think about letting her go alone to the school, without me, but I still don't consider seriously this possibility for safety reasons. She knows the route very well, but we don't have sidewalks and I don't think it's safe to leave her alone. I can't trust that every driver is attentive enough in traffic. But I want to walk with her, also for physical activity and physical health. This is a main reason for walking. It's not very comfortable, giving the lack of sidewalks and the heavy traffic in a

certain area. It's rather an adventure for us, but I'm motivated by the benefits for physical health.

The infrastructure is the main obstacle for not using other transportation modalities, like the bike. If the streets would have bicycle lanes, I would definitely use them. I would also add the lack of time on this list, as an obstacle for not using other transportation modalities besides my car. On the other side, the reasons for making a change consist on saving fuel and improving physical health.

My daughter is familiar with all transportation options. She is also involved in different educational activities in the school program, about transportation. I recently used the train for a mobility financed by my institution. They paid for train tickets, but not travel by personal car. Therefore, I used the train that was dirty enough to not feel good. This experience reinforced the idea that public transportation is not a good option.

For shopping, I go to the market from the city and I use the car. For leisure activities with my friends, I always use my car. In the town, the lack of parking is a problem.

If I'm thinking about changing something about transportation, I would use more often public transportation, but only if this public transportation would be different. Giving the current situation, I would rather walk, than using a bus. Crowding and dirt cause me very unpleasant sensations. In other countries, I admire public transportation and the fact that people can read a book in a bus or in a train, for example. In my opinion, this is not possible in our country. If the situations would be different, I would consider using more often other transportation options instead of my car.

My daughter likes to go with the bus. On Fridays, she goes to her father with the school bus to the place he takes her. She is very excited and impatient to go by bus. In the morning, when we walk to school, she takes this experience as an adventure. However, my impression is that she is a little nervous and anxious for the fact that there are many cars speeding past us. You can't feel safe like that, walking among cars.

Around me, my friends and my neighbours use personal cars in most of the time. Some parents of the children from the same class with my daughter use the school bus for taking the children to the school, from the town.

In the childhood, I walked a lot, from one part of the city to the other part. Including in adolescence, I also walked every day in the morning and back home, after school. In the present, I don't keep the same habits that helped me a lot to have a good fit. Sometimes I wonder why I can't walk more in the present. I will think about how can I improve my transport situation in the future. For now, this is what I can do.

Quotes

Honestly, if it were possible to travel in a polite, clean manner, I would consider it.

More for educational purposes we go by tram or bus.

The rhythm of life requires me to use the car.

Keywords



Car, civilization, safety, time, infrastructure

RL7_RO04, Romania, In traffic all day long

Narrative

I am a woman, 43 years of age. I live with my family, that has four members: me, my husband, and our children. We have a 7-year-old boy and a 13-year-old boy. We live in a small village near a north-eastern city in Romania. We have our house here. Usually, we use my job car and our personal car for transportation. Based on our program from our job, me or my husband assume the responsibility to take the children to school and to pick them up at the end of the school program. Going to the job and taking the children to school represent around 90% of our daily transportation necessities. Exceptionally, when neither I nor my husband can pick up children from school, my father-in-law helps us. When he can't help us, we order a taxi. We never use public transportation. We begin our days earlier. At 7 a clock in the morning we (me or my husband) leave the house with our 7 years old son to his school. We stay almost an hour in traffic. Sometimes more than an hour. Then, the adult that is with the child goes to his job. At 11.30, one of us need to be available to take the other son from home and to take him to school. At the same time, we need to take the little boy from school and to take him home. My father-in-law came to our home to stay with my son. The adult that was involved in this activities returns to his job. In the second part of the day, the children have various activities. The small one study the music (on Thursday) and baseball (Monday, Wednesday). Someone need to take him and wait him there or return to take him back home. The other boy also has baseball classes in other days, after his school hours. He finishes his program at around 9.30 pm. Therefore, we use the car from the morning, at 7am, until the evening or night at 9.30 pm. One of us (me or my husband) is taxi drivers for the children and we have four or five round trips per day. We exclude walking, for job and school. We walk and we use bicycles only for a healthy life and for fun. We would not agree to let our children to go alone with the bike, because it's not safe. I would not feel safe. Concerning the public transportation, in this moment there is no possibility to use a bus because there is no bus in the area we live. However, from the January next year, the municipality announced that it will change the route of the minibus and it will pass right in front of our house. In this situation, we thought that the older boy could use the minibus, we will make him a subscription. The main obstacles that impede me to use other transportations that personal car are: the long distance from our home to the place we need to go in the city, the lack of sidewalks (even I would want to walk for 10 km, this would not be possible, without sidewalks), the lack of bike lanes (even if it would be, I would not feel safe), the fact that the actual buses are at inappropriate hours for my needs and are dirty. I would like a civilized public transport and more frequent than one every half hour. On the new route that will be from January, there will be buses with very good conditions, from what I heard. Concerning the current

situation, the main problem is the lack of time. It's very difficult to be all the day in traffic. The heavy traffic is something considered almost a normality of our life. We got used to it, we were leaving an hour earlier. The infrastructure is another problem. The areas on the outskirts of the city have become very congested and the access roads to the city are as few as before.

The change I want to make in the future consist on using public transportation for the older boy. I also intend to use public transportation on Friday (green Friday). I would want to do this for having the opportunity to see the world around. My husband would not use anything other than his personal car.

If I would use more the bicycle or I would walk more, I would feel better, definitively. This is the only reason I would want to use bike or walking, for health and maybe to go to a market, for small stoppings. In the present, I use the car for shopping.

In my family, the older boy is very excited that he will use the bus and he will be independent. We love to walk and to use the bike, but we will not use this transportation means for school or for the job. In the future, I would like to have the promised public transportation in our locality, to have bike lanes, to have adequate sidewalks (where they are, they are very narrow now), to have pedestrian areas. My friends, my neighbour also use personal cars in most of the time. I have two neighbours that use the school bus for the transportation of their children to the school that is in the same locality. If my children had gone to the school in the village, I would have used the school minibuss. They don't go here, because the capacity of the school was below the number of children.

When I was a child I exclusively walked, therefore this old habit did not influence my transportation practices in the present. The habit from childhood influenced the transportation option in the college, when I always walked from my place to the faculty.

In the end, I would say that I am convinced that we can reduce the pollution if we would try to reduce the use of personal car. If each of us gave up the car at least for a day in the week, pollution would definitely be lower.

Quotes

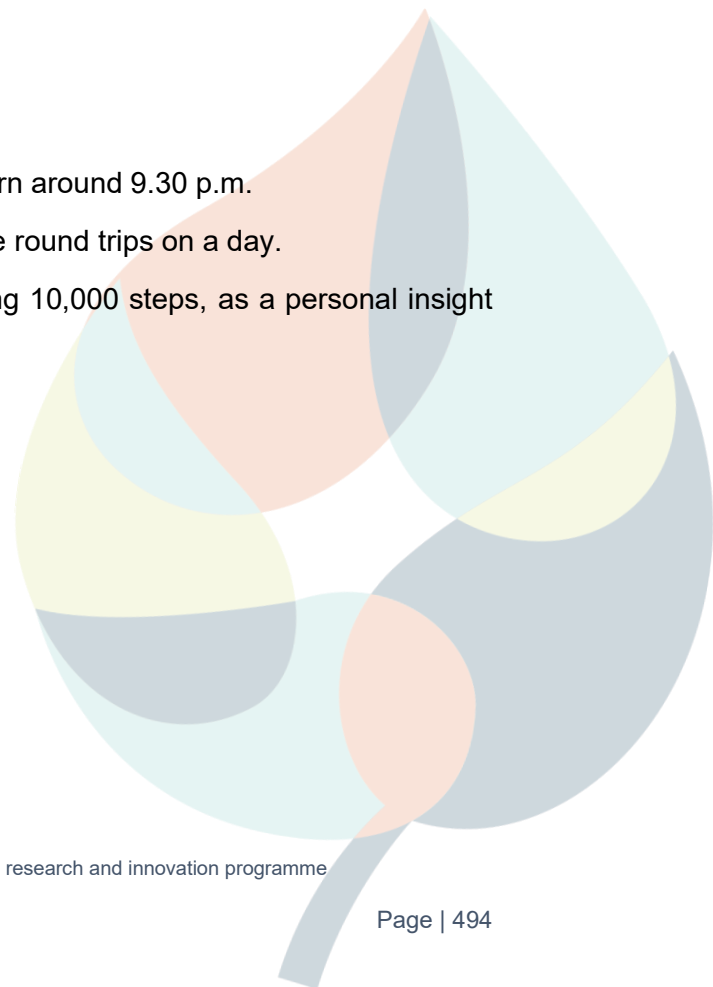
By car, we go in the morning from 7 o'clock and return around 9.30 p.m.

Someone must be a taxi driver with about four or five round trips on a day.

We practice walking only for that objective of walking 10,000 steps, as a personal insight for a heathy life.

Keywords

Time, children, busy days, fatigue, car



RL7_RO05, Romania, Enjoying the fresh air

Narrative

I am a 28-year-old woman and I live in small village near a north-eastern city of Romania with my sister. I have a job in the city and I also have courses at the faculty. In the present, I am a student at my second faculty. Each day of the week, I go in the city. Usually I use public transportation, because I don't have a personal car. I also use the bike. Giving the fact that I live in an area situated from a long distance (almost five kilometres) to the centre of the city, where I have the job and the faculty, I use public transportation in the morning. When I return home, I also take a bus. I like to walk, but not from home to the city giving the long distance. However, if I am in the city and I need to go from one place to another, I walk even on long distances of several kilometres.

Concerning the current situation about transportation, I have several problems. First of all, I would say that public transportation is insufficient and inadequate. From where I live to the town, there is only one bus and this fact limits my freedom to go at any time I want. This minibus runs once every half hour. The advantage is the fact that we know the hour when it arrives in the bus station. However, it would be better if the frequency would be higher. Sometimes, especially at noon, the busses are very crowded and for this reason sometimes I use a car (a taxi or a friend's car) to go to the city. Another problem consists of the lack of bicycles lanes and the lack of a clear delimitation from the pedestrian area. Moreover, there is not a continuity between bicycles lanes, in the places where these lanes exist. When I am not using the public transportation or a car, I prefer the scooter. It is more convenient for me, because the bike, for example, implies a physical effort and you don't want to arrive at the job or at the faculty sweat. However, I would use more often the scooter only if it would be specific lanes for these transportation motilities. Although we can use the main streets for the scooter, I don't think it's safe and I would not use them on the main street, in the road area.

I think that people have a high contribution on reduction the pollution. However, I consider that the large companies have higher control and the main responsibilities, through the production of electric cars. The necessities for mobility are increased today and I don't think that we can give up at cars in order to pollute less. Given the evolution of the society and the current necessities, giving up to personal cars is not a solution. The solution would be to have cars less polluting.

In my family, my sister clearly prefers the car or public transportation. She does not use the bike, the scooter or walking. My friends with the same age or with a smaller age than mine generally use the public transportation. I have several friends that are using the bike and their behaviour also encourage me to also use the bike. Some of the friends with an older age than mine use the personal car. In the future, I would want to have more public transportation options, with a higher frequency. I also see the necessity to improve the infrastructure and to supplement of parking spaces, so that the cars to not occupy spaces for bike lanes, for example. I would definitively like to have a personal car but probably I will not use it very often. For example, I will not use it for shopping or for meeting my friends. I would use it instead of public transportation, but it would not replace walking or using the bike. The main motivation for me to use more frequently sustainable

transportation is the necessity to have fresh air. In our town, the pollution is very high and I observed this in recent years. The smell from the cars, on the streets, is very strong and I am thinking at this fact when I decide to use the cars less often. Another reason consists on the desire to have a healthy life style. The education received in the childhood influenced my behaviour in the present, about transportation. When I was a little girl, there were not so many cars. My parents didn't have a car, I used to walk a lot. I think that helped me maintain a healthier lifestyle even now. When I was younger, we used to walk about 2 km to school. I believe that my high school and college education positively influenced my attitude towards transport. Even this interview contributes to my education about transportation and I consider to reanalyse my situation after this evening.

Quotes

In today's society, it would be difficult for us to give up cars just for the sake of the environment.

When I'm in town, I prefer to walk.

Even if I care about the environment in one way or another, if I had to choose whether to have a personal car or not, I would definitely choose to have one. But I probably wouldn't use it that often.

Keywords

Walk, buses, scooter, bike, fresh air

RL7_RO06, Romania, Reviewing the decision to live outside the city

Narrative

I am a 36-year-old woman and I live with my husband and my child in a small village near a north-eastern city of Romania. My little boy has 2 years old. Me and my husband we work remote, from our home, but we have the child at kinder-garden and we need to use transportation daily.

In the present we use personal car all the time. In the past, we used to use the bike but it was very inconvenient and difficult given the lack of the bicycle lanes. You need to

use the same street as the cars and it is not very comfortable and safe to use the bike under these conditions. Now, that we also have the child, we exclude the possibility to use the bike with him. Concerning public transportation, it is not appropriate for us, because the bus station is at a distance of almost one kilometre and 500 meters from our home and the only way to have this distance is to walk. It is difficult to cover the distance by walking because we have the problem of the absence of sidewalks. In addition, there is only one bus, at certain fixed times. If you need to be somewhere at a particular hour, it's difficult to rely on the bus and to wait it at a particular time.

Because we work from home, we don't need to use the car or another modality of transportation for our daily necessities, but our children goes to kindergarten. Therefore, every morning, we take him at kindergarten. At the end of the program, we pick him up. Very often, almost every week, we go to a physician with my child. Sometimes, me and my husband go to the gym and at the market, for shopping. For all these transportation necessities, we use the personal car. We also make small shopping from a market near us and we walk all the way there and back. These are our necessities for transportation is on an ordinary day of the week.

My main problems that impede us to use other transportation modalities instead of personal car, are the lack of sidewalks and the lack of public transportation, according to our needs (the bus station closer, higher frequencies). In the present, we use the bicycle only for fun, for our leisure activities. If I would use more often the bike, this would be beneficial for my physical health. The physical effort is a motivation for using the bike. My husband sometimes uses the scooter. My child enjoys using the bus. We didn't offer him many examples of transportation because it's not safe for go with him on the bike.

If I'm thinking about what I would want to change concerning my situation about transportation, I would definitively say that Yes, I want better public transportation. The difficult traffic and the fact the we spend a lot of time in traffic is one of my main problem and I would like to see an improvement concerning this issue. If there were more buses, maybe people would use them more and then it wouldn't be so crowded. Now, the area is hellish. Also, the bus seems to me to be a safer means of transport, which also allows you to do something else while traveling (for example, read, watch something). It's, also, more relaxing. In addition, it would give me much more freedom, because I don't have a driver's license and I depend on my husband. If I have to go somewhere, he goes too. For this reason, I would use the bus, if I could. Another beneficial change for me would involve more sidewalks and bike lanes. I wouldn't ride a bike on the street for cars, because it's very dangerous, some cars ride too close to cyclists and it doesn't seem safe to me. If there were bike lanes, I would use them more often. Around me, my friends, my neighbours usually use the car. This is a general tendency. In the past, in the childhood and adolescence, I walked a lot. The area I lived allowed me to walk. Now, we live far away from many necessities and it's impossible to walk. However, we consider the option to move in the city to be more close to many facilities and to not be necessary to use the car all the time.

Quotes

If there were more buses in the areas, maybe people would give up to cars and it wouldn't be so crowded.

It seems less dangerous to go by bus.

It would give me a lot of freedom [the presence of buses] because I don't have a driver's license.

Keywords

Child, car, kindergarten, freedom, safety, crowded

RL7_RO07, Romania, Enjoy the nature

Narrative

I am 33-year-old woman and I live on the outskirts of a north-eastern city of Romania about 10 km from the city centre. I live with my two children and my husband. I have two boys, 4 years old and 10 years old. I face traffic every day, both in transporting children to school, kindergarten, and on the way to work.

The most important problem in traffic is congestion. We have to leave earlier and earlier, from one year to another, to arrive on time. In the morning, my husband takes the children to school and kindergarten. Both children study in different buildings that belong to the same institution, in the same yard. I go to work, at the other part of the city. In order to be able to return on time, to take my children home, at the end of the program, I start my program earlier in the morning. If I left the job at 4 o'clock, as I should, I wouldn't be able to make it in time to pick up the children. For all these trips, we use our personal cars (we have two cars).

Walking through the job would be impossible, because of the distance, while walking to the school is not a very good option, because we should walk for about 20 minutes. In the morning and in the cold season, I would not agree to walk with the children. However, I remember that in my childhood I used to walk a lot, about an hour to and from school. My parents didn't have a car. Now the opportunities are different. In the past, when I was a child, there was not so much traffic, there were not so many cars and it was safer. Although walking is not a habit to us, we are trying to teach the older child to walk home from school. He enjoys this, because he becomes independent. I started with small steps, following him without a car, accompanying him and explaining to him the path from school to home, what to pay attention to. In our free time, we enjoy cycling. Recently, the children have discovered riding a bicycle and they enjoy using it. On weekends we try to go to the supermarket by bicycle, for small shopping. We do this both for health and for fun, to spend time together. Driving can be a waste of time, while riding a bicycle, rollerblades, or scooter can be a way of connecting with others. If I intend to use the bicycle for shopping, on the weekend, and I fail to do this, the lack of time is the main obstacle that would block

me. I could also say that the weather conditions would be another impediment. In the past, I used public transportation to go to work, but I needed to change two buses, which was too difficult. Sometimes I even spent two hours in traffic until I get to work. For this reason, I started using my personal car. I would like to use the bus again, if there was only one direct from my house to the job. I could do many things during the journey, with the bus. When I use my personal car, it's a waste of time. The main obstacle for using public transportation is the fact that we don't have a direct bus, and the existing ones are very crowded. We do not benefit from the transport offered by the school, for students, because we are not on the school bus route. Also, I don't think that this bus would have the capacity to meet the needs of all residents who have children at school and kindergarten. We are a continuously growing village and there are many new residents each year. Other problems I have in traffic are related to the infrastructure. The streets are narrow and insufficiently to make traffic easier. One-way streets would be very useful and I was directly involved in requesting these changes in our village. I am the representative of the parents in the class where my child is a student and in collaboration with the school and the town hall, we are trying to implement some changes to increase traffic safety. What motivates me to get involved in making these changes is the safety of our children. I strongly believe that each of us is responsible for what happens in nature. If each of us made a small effort to sometimes give up the car, it would be useful for us to have cleaner air. It is in our power and if it does not start from us, everyone relies on the other and, in the end, no one does anything. The main reasons why I would use other transportation modalities, apart from the car, would have to do with connecting with others. Other obstacles that prevent us from using sustainable transport are the lack of pedestrian crossings (there are not enough and are not properly signposted), the lack of bike lanes, the narrow streets. When we walk, the presence of cars makes the experience not a very pleasant one. Driving makes us a little impersonal. I would like my children to feel a little the way I grew up, to be closer to nature. I think that well-being is greatly influenced by the way we move. And physical health would be better if we travelled by bicycle. Also, we would be more connected with life, with nature, we would not speed past everything that is happening. When driving, you can't see if someone needs help, you can't admire nature, you can't enjoy life the same way as when you walk. In our family, it is a joy to walk. Using other transportation modalities besides the car is a funny activity, desired by all family members. I have friends who adopt the same attitude as me regarding transport. I know older people who walk quite long distances (for example, from home to church). I also have friends who prefer to travel by car, out of convenience, out of habit. It's a personal choice. My experience of walking to school as a child made me see walking as a normal thing, which has many benefits. I'm glad that there are studies and interest in this direction, because we need it.

Quotes

I believe that standing in traffic with a personal car is time that we lose and that we could gain with public transport. I strongly believe that each of us is responsible for what happens in nature. Driving often makes us impersonal. We can't connect.

Keywords

Nature, safety, children, enjoy, car, fun, time

RL7_RO08, Romania, Old infrastructure, new society

Narrative

I live in a small village which is very close to a north-eastern city of Romania. From my place to the exit of the village, it takes about three minutes by car. I live with my wife and two children. We travel by car every day. We have two cars. Children start school between 7.30 and 8.00 am and in order to arrive on time, we have to leave home at 7.00. A few years ago, we could leave the home at 7:15, but lately the area has become very congested, blocks of flats have been built in the area, so traffic is much more difficult. We bring children home around 3.00 or 4.00 pm. They don't finish the school program at the same time. On some days, they have activities after school (e.g., basketball). So, we pick them up from school, take them where they need to go, then come back home. I generally work from home. I have an office in the city, but I don't use it very often. I work in IT. When I go to the office, I go by car. Around 9:00 a.m., the traffic is very light and does not represent a problem. My wife is the one who usually takes the children to school, then goes to the office and returns home in the evening. During the day, she moves all over the city, having meetings with various clients, being a lawyer. She travels by car. On weekends, we don't have free days in terms of transportation, because our children have all kinds of activities. Every weekend day, we have about two round trips. In these days, however, we don't have problems with traffic, it is free. Only on Sunday evening, sometimes the area is crowded, because many people come to walk in the Copou park and park their cars on the side of the street, which complicates the traffic. This is happening when the weather is warm. I noticed that during the school holidays, the traffic jams disappear. This means that taking children to school leads to a very congested traffic in the suburbs of the city. The main problem for me concerning transportation is the time I get somewhere, not the transportation modality. The streets are narrow; you only have two lanes. In our area, towards the entrance to Iasi, we have some huge sidewalks for pedestrians, on which no one moves, and cars crowd into two lanes. The problem is that the road space is not allocated very well. When you are staying in traffic, the pollution is automatically double. The simplest would be to change the infrastructure, to make traffic easier, not to eliminate the cars. What I noticed is that here, in the area, a new, very large block has appeared, and the infrastructure is the same. Thousands of people come to the area, congesting the area, without changing anything at the infrastructure level. In our

locality, we don't really have public transport. We have some minibuses that are not comfortable at all. I went a few times when I had the car in service and it doesn't seem like a suitable option at all. If you have a bag, a piece of luggage, you have nowhere to hold it, except in your arms, if you don't want to occupy two seats. The children are 13 and 14 years old, but I wouldn't let them go to school with the minibus. I don't trust that they would be safe. These minibuses do not seem safe at all. I would compare them with some bigger boxes. There is also a sloping area here and it would not be very difficult for me to see them rolling. We have four bikes. In the last year, they got a bit rusty, we didn't really use them. From the exit of the village, there was something what could be considered a bike path, but as far as I understood it is not a bike path. This is an obstacle to use the bicycle. I wouldn't go with the bike on the road, because many people don't drive carefully or preventively. I would only use it for recreation, and not for any other purpose. At the exit of the village there is a very steep slope, where you cannot use the bicycle. Nothing is being done to encourage cycling. Many go by car to the shop 200 meters away to buy a loaf of bread. This happens because the car also represents a social status. It is associated with either youth or poverty. If you go to work in the morning by bicycle, and you are not really young anymore, it means that you are poor and many would not want to be given this label. Moreover, there is the mentality that you need a big car, even if they don't need a lot of space. The changes in traffic that I would see as the most useful for me and my family involve setting up new traffic lanes. This would also reduce pollution enormously, because we wouldn't have to spend so much time in traffic. It would also reduce the psychological tension for people.

Secondly, maybe it would be useful to have more electric cars. In fact, however, electric cars only move pollution from one side to another. Their batteries produce pollution at the time of production and then as waste. However, if there were parking spaces with electric sockets, maybe electric cars would be a good solution. The problem of parking spaces can be added to the list, but it is already a normality of everyday life, so that there is no point in talking about it. In Romania, people don't believe too much in what the local authorities can do, because they don't do much for them. And people can think why would they care, if others don't care about them. A few psychologists and sociologists could analyse the collective mind, if we want a lasting change. The model we could have is Amsterdam. In our city it is more difficult, because we have many hills. In my family, children are happy that we take them wherever they want with the car. They don't want another transportation modality. They went by train and tram. They liked it, it as a mild positive experience, but they don't want to change the mode of transport. In our area, the neighbours almost always travel by car. It is also a safety issue. Right here where I live, the road is good, it's very good, but we don't have sidewalks. People were driving at a very high speed. You can only walk on the road, because there is no surface on which you can walk, apart from it. If two people go, they must go in Indian line. That's why people have to use cars. Some have two or three cars. As a child, I used to walk, about half an hour away and then the same, on the way back from school. The parents had a car, but there was not an option to go to school by car. But then it was safer. Now, you don't feel safe.

Quotes



I think the most important thing would be the arrangement of new traffic lanes. [...] It would enormously reduce pollution, it would reduce the time spent in traffic, it would reduce the mental tension for people.

A mental problem here, everyone buys a big car.

Our mentality at the present time is not inclined towards buying a bicycle. [...] The car also represents a social status.

Keywords

Traffic lanes, infrastructure, safety, time, comfort, pollution, congestion

RL7_RO09, Romania, Life is possible without a car

Narrative

I am a 39-year-old woman and I live in a village near a north-eastern city of Romania. I work at the university in the city, I'm a lecturer. I am alone, but sometimes my father comes and lives with me for a period of time. I go to town every day, to my job. There are two transportation modalities that I use daily, depending on the time I have. I use either the taxi or the public transport offered by the municipality. In general, my mobility necessities involve access to the city, so I have to use one of the two transportation modalities. Walking would be impossible, because the distance from my home to the job is very long. The village where I live is on the opposite side of locality, when leaving the city. I would have to cross the entire village and a good part of the city to get to work. It would take me at least two hours to get to the job by walking and another two hours to return home. To use the bicycle is not a good option, because I do not have the necessary physical condition for this activity. For minor purchases, I could also go to the village, to a store, but in general I go to the city for everything I need. I live in this area for two years. Before, I lived in the city and travelled more by walking than in the present. On an ordinary day during the week, I leave home in the morning for going in the city, generally by minibus. There is also a part of the path where I walk because the bus stop is not really close to my house. It's a bit complicated, because I arrive in the city and from the last bus station, I have to walk again, to another station, from where I have to take another bus to work. Therefore, from home to work, I use two public transportation modalities. At the end of the day, in the afternoon or at the evening, I usually return with a taxi, because I'm too tired to change two buses and to walk between bus stations. I also use the taxi when I

have heavy bags, when I come from shopping and it is more difficult to use the minibus. Apart from the fact that a lot of time is lost on the route from home to work, I have no other major problems concerning transportation. Towards my village it is not as crowded as in other areas of the city, because here, in this area, it is not allowed to build blocks of flats. Being only houses, the traffic is not congested. At the moment, the towards the city and return minibus schedule is very good, there are many trips, starting at 5.00 in the morning. I don't know what will happen from January, next year, because the company that now provides the transport will end the contract and will not resigned it. They are still discussing and negotiating, the route and timetable are not known for sure. It was under discussion that the minibus would come to the town hall, which is quite far from where I live. That would be a problem. I don't know if I would like to change anything regarding my transportation modalities. The only change would be maybe to buy a personal car, but I don't want this change at the moment. I don't think I need a car. I have a driver's license, but I haven't driven since I got it. What motivates me to use public transport and not a car, would be the ease. Especially in winter, for example, it is quite difficult to remove the snow, to remove the car from the yard. In the morning, in the minibus, I make my plan for the following day. On the way back, it's relaxing not to be the one who drives. On weekends, I use the same transportation modalities, but I have fewer necessities for transport. There are weeks when I don't travel at all during the weekend. Maybe, at most of the time, I go to the shop in the village, by walking. On a long distance, I would not walk, because of the time. There are also some dogs on the route from home to the city and I heard some people who had problems with them. For me, it's a problem and a reason why I would avoid walking in that area. I even heard people who were cycling there and had a problem. There is a person at the entrance to the village who has collected many dogs. They manage to get out of the yard and really represent a problem. My father is much more active about me. All day he travels by minibus in various places from the town. He doesn't really travel by taxi, and he doesn't have a personal car. Among my neighbours, they all have at least two cars. Some of them have even three cars. And friends almost all use their personal car. I don't really understand the decision to buy three cars, one for the husband, one for the wife and one for the whole family. However, everyone knows their necessities better. In the past, in my childhood and in adolescence, even during my student years, I used to walk a lot. Over time, I became lazier and I started to use taxis and buses more often. But given the whole context of my life, with all the activities I have daily, I am satisfied with my current situation concerning transportation. I also have a target of at least eight thousand steps per day, which I do, so I also walk. I am satisfied with my situation in terms of transportation.

Certainly, each of us can do something to reduce pollution. Children can walk to their schools or they can use public transport. Instead of three cars, you can have only one. I don't know everyone's needs, but I believe that solutions can come from us, if we want to contribute to the improvement the global situation.

Quotes

I have a driver's license but I haven't driven since I got it. It makes no sense. You can travel with something else.

For me, it is relaxing to travel by bus.

Surely each of us can do something to change something.

Keywords

Bus, taxi, walk, time, distance

RL7_RO10, Romania, You have children, you need a car

Narrative

I am a man, 37-year-old. I am married, I live in a small village near a north-eastern city of Romania and I have two children. I'm working in the city, as a chemist in a hospital. Currently, most of the time, we travel by car from home to the city, because one child is at school in the city, and the other is at kindergarten in my village. It is difficult to move otherwise, without a car, bearing in mind that you have to get to school and kindergarten at time with your children. Sometimes, we also depend on the weather condition.

In the morning, between 7.00 and 8.00, we left the home with the children. I take our girl to school, in the city, then I go on to work. We left home at 7.10, to arrive on time. Her school is in the city, on the way to my work. My wife takes the other child to kindergarten, then she goes to work. The kindergarten is in our village, closer to our home. In the afternoon, one of us picks up the children from after-school and kindergarten and we all return home around 5.00 – 6.00 pm. We make all these trips with our personal cars. We have two cars, I use one, and my wife uses the other. In our free time, we still use the bikes, but less often and only for leisure activities.

In the area where we live, there are public transportation services, but they are not very suitable for our needs. When you need it, you can't find it right away, and more recently, on weekends, we don't have any public transportation at all. The minibuses that run from our locality to the village are only from Monday to Friday. The main problem I face related to transportation is congestion in traffic. In the areas at the entrance to the city, a lot of time are lost in traffic. Apart from traffic, parking spaces, roads with potholes, unfinished and abandoned road modernization works represent other problems that I could add to the list of difficulties. I thought about possible changes in terms of transportation, such as changing the car to a more environmentally friendly one, to an electric one. I didn't think, however, to exchange the car for something else, because the car offers you an easier fulfilment of your daily mobility needs. With children especially, I don't see what other way I could use. Therefore, we have not thought about not using our

personal car. Maybe we would consider, if it would be favourable public transportation service for us. For example, it would be useful to have a single transport to the places where we need to reach. At the moment, there is a minibus that leaves once an hour from the city and comes to my village. It also departs from my village once an hour. This one, however, serves only a part of the village, because it does not circulate on all the streets, and after 6 o'clock in the evening it no longer circulates at all. The fact that it runs once an hour is an inconvenience for us and would prevent us from using it. Walking on the way to school and job it's a bit difficult. The distance to the school where the children study consists of several kilometres. For shopping, we sometimes use online orders, starting from the pandemic period. We order from home and we don't use the car for going to the market. Sometimes we bought from the village store in the way back to home. In general, however, we use the car for shopping, when we don't order them online. If we used more walking or cycling, I think we would have health benefits. To use the bicycle, we would first need special bicycle lanes, a certain order in traffic, compliance with the rules from other traffic participants. There are now some bike lanes around the city, but from what I've noticed, cyclists slalom between pedestrians, because the lane is not free. In the village where I live, there are no bike lanes at all. In our family, there are no members who prefer another transportation modality, other than our personal cars. The biggest obstacles that prevent us from choosing more sustainable ways are, for us, represented by the schedule of the buses, the crowding of the buses, the fact that they do not arrive on time. Around me, among neighbours and friends, I mostly notice similarities concerning transportation modalities, but there are also some differences. I have noticed that some colleagues prefer to walk to work on certain days, depending on the weather, but they live closer to work than I do. I also noticed that other friends prefer to come to work by bicycle in the summer. I think it's more difficult, because after you get to work you have to have a change of clothes and take a shower. After pedalling for half an hour, you can't stay at work with your colleagues all day. In the family I grew up in, my parents didn't have a car. We moved a lot by walking. A little later, when I grew up, I used the bicycle. In general, however, we walked. Now, I walk every day when I take the dog for a walk. When the weather is nice, I sometimes take a walk in the evening with the other family members. Therefore, at present I use walking for free time and recreation, not to fulfil some necessities. I think it is very important to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Because of them, we observe climate change. Now we are at the beginning of November and we have evening temperatures of 17-20 Celsius degrees, which is not normal. People should change their way of life, they should think more about the planet and not ignore that climate change is not beneficial.

Quotes

It is difficult to move by walking or use alternative transport, considering that you have children.

The car offers you some mobility when you need it.

Until we can use the bicycle, we need bicycle routes that serve my village and continue into the city.

Keywords

Family, car, time, children, school, job

RL7_GR01, Greece, Fear of using bicycles due to lack of bike lanes

Narrative

I am a 53-year-old woman, a mother of 5 and I work in a small workshop that produces gifts for the home. We are all adults in the family, so we use various means of transportation, by car, by bus, or by motorcycle that my son has. I have a son and two daughters. My daughters use the bus, they don't drive, so to get to their university, which they go to every day, they either use the bus to work, or they walk alternatively if the distance is not too far. Thankfully the workshop that I work in is very close to our house, so on a daily basis we don't need to use a means of transport to go to work. "My eldest daughter studies in Thessaloniki and her university is in the centre. Too many times she has thought she would like to use her bike, which was bought for this reason, to get to her university so she doesn't have to use the bus and because it's too far she can't walk. The place where we live is not at all easy to reach the centre with such a way of transport. However, I think it's something very dangerous, since there's no bike lane, there's a lot of traffic, and it's something that scares me and I advise her not to do it. Now another alternative, would probably be some kind of electric scooter from those that have been circulating in recent years, but this is also something that scares me personally for the exact same reason I told you before about the bicycle. So public transport is necessarily used". "Regarding transport in our free time we choose to travel on foot. That is, we also see it as a way to exercise, to tell you the truth, we also like walking. If this is not possible then we must use the car. To tell the truth, we do not choose the means of transport for activities outside work, because there is also a very strong phenomenon of overcrowding in public transport, so we try to avoid it". This is especially important because of the coronavirus situation there is an extra health hazard, that is, in overcrowded buses with such intense crowding, there is definitely a higher chance of some disease being transmitted, be it coronavirus or any other virus circulating in the winter months. "For me it would be really very good if there were cycle pathways in most parts of the city giving the possibility to use a bicycle. I personally like it a lot as a means of transport, it is completely ecological, you can exercise, help your body at the same time, and it is also a very pleasant way of transport, so for me something like this would be ideal". "It would be very nice to reduce the pollutants from cars that we all breathe in every day, that is, it would play a huge role in the better atmosphere if we could use other modes of transport. I think

there would be less anxiety, less tension, this chaos caused by traffic also causes negative emotions. Then these two I think if we combine them we will have the ideal as you said before”. Regarding hinders “safety is one thing that comes to my mind right now and really bothers me because as I told you I really like to walk and use this mode of transportation so I think there is a huge problem with the sidewalks especially if I can mention specifically parts of my district, for example which I go to once or twice a week for entertainment purposes, there is a terrible problem with the sidewalks which are either damaged or cars are parked on them because there is nowhere else for local residents to park their cars”.

Quotes

However, I think it’s something very dangerous, since there’s no bike lane, there’s a lot of traffic, and it’s something that scares me and I advise her not to do it.

Keywords

Coronavirus, lack of bike lanes, overcrowding in public transport

RL7_GR02, Greece, Public transport and bicycle lanes in a very bad state which makes using a car a necessity

Narrative

I am a 40-year-old woman, I have two children, 16 years old and 12, I work as an employee in a lawyer’s office in the centre of Thessaloniki, specifically in Vardari, very centrally. As a family we own a car that my husband uses to go to work, which is outside of Thessaloniki, so he necessarily takes the car to go there because its the only way apart from the bus which takes about 1 hour to get there. It’s 20 kilometres and the bus takes about one hour for so he prefers to pay for gas, oil and go with his car. Now as for me, I take a bus by necessity as Thessaloniki has no other means of transport and the district I live in has many people but strangely has the oldest buses and very small ones. This is a very big problem because when you wait almost 20 minutes for the bus to come and it finally comes and it’s full and you can’t fit and you’re also spending around an hour to get to work. Of course we are in a good mood to help for our environmental footprint but unfortunately we have no help to do that”. “Of course we don’t want to pollute, I don’t want

to get a second car, I suggest that my children also take the bus because my daughter also goes to the centre for her tutoring school and my daughter also travels by bus with all that entails, delays, poor quality of driver behaviour, because the bus drivers also face this situation, that is, broken down buses, which is their tool, it is their job, so it is not the most pleasant, but unfortunately this is what we have, this is all we have". "I have also tried to walk the route, but I want at least half an hour or 3 quarters of an hour, as I am a fast walker, but it is not possible to do this every day as we also have a family, we have obligations and we have to catch up with a lot of chores, whether that's at home or that's the children's extracurricular activities, so we don't have that ability to use rely on foot".

"The buses are really old It's tragic, I know that they work hard to sustain them to be on the road, that is, well done to the technicians who are still saving them while they are very old buses, but unfortunately buses transform into boats during the big floods and let in water, I think only in Thessaloniki this happens which says something". Now as far as extracurricular activities are concerned, as a mother I try to avoid the bus, which is unfortunately not a good form of transportation, so I try to limit it, to limit extracurricular activities so they take place in my neighbourhood and I do the same with my children so their extracurricular activities take place in our neighbourhood.

Regarding other means of transport "I'm too scared to use a bike as the cycle paths in Thessaloniki are unfortunately very dangerous, those that have been built are not even complete and in fact they are not complete at junctions that are too dangerous for the physical integrity of the cyclist, , and also, whether it's a bicycle or an electric scooter, for me it's the same, because it's too dangerous due to the badly built or incomplete cycle pathways.

Moving forward I think they should buy new buses, hire new drivers, but this require money, that I don't know if Greece has taken it and spent it on things other than what they have given us to do. That is, if the buses could pass every 5, every 10 minutes, the way they should pass, there would be neither overcrowding, nor this bad mood inside the buses, they would be able to clean them properly because now we also have the corona virus which is very dangerous when you are in an overcrowded bus. At home as a family, we have realised that we are in a very difficult time, as far as economic issues is concerned, as well as the energy crisis, and we also are trying as much as possible to reduce or minimise our own footprint on the earth by using either foot or by public transport whenever we can, whenever the state leaves allow us these options.

Quotes

The buses are really old It's tragic, I know that they work hard to sustain them to be on the road, that is, well done to the technicians who are still saving them while they are very old buses, but unfortunately buses transform into boats during the big floods and let in water, I think only in Thessaloniki this happens which says something.

Now as for me, I take a bus by necessity as Thessaloniki has no other means of transport and the district I live in has many people but strangely has the oldest buses and very small ones.

Keywords

Old buses, coronavirus, bad state of buses, lack of public transport

RL7_GR03, Greece, A family that struggles with lack of efficient public transport

Narrative

I am a 48-year-old woman, who lives in Stavroupolis, and I am mother of two children whom I raise alone. I work in the same area.

Initially, the first years I used to move around in the city with my car because I love driving and it was the easiest way for me. I have a small car, but in the last years I have become more aware on the environment and I decided to reduce the use of my car and look for alternatives ways of transport.

Since my work is very close to my house I now walk to work. It is about 15 minutes walk and I like it very much. But I would like to say that this area is lacks of green spaces. There is only a park, that fortunately I have to go through when I walk to my job, and this is one reason I like to walk to my job. It feels really nice to see flowers and have this image when you walk. But even this park has a lot of garbage and it is not well taken care of. There is only one bus that passes by my house, and I do not use it because it is very crowded, it does not pass frequently, and so it is not efficient and safe also because of Covid pandemic. When I have to go to the city centre, I also avoid using the bus. As I said there is only one bus that has west-direction and goes to the city centre. If I want to go to another area of the city, I have to walk a long way to find a suitable bus. So to go to the city centre I do not use the bus because of the same reasons, too crowded and not frequent, and because the distance is far away I use my car, and leave it in a parking. If I do not take the car I walk, but for longer distances in the city this is not always feasible.

The problem is that there are no parking spaces in the city centre, so I have a lot of difficulties when I have to go to the city centre and I take my car, there is also a lot of traffic.

My two daughters unfortunately do not have a choice and move in the city with the bus, and this makes their live very difficult. For instance, two years ago we had high mobility in the city because of the extra-curricular activities, we had to go to Evosmos for the dance school for my younger daughter, another activity in the other side of the city, in Vassilisis Olgas, and another one in the city centre (Diagnoios). And if they used the bus they were always very late, it was impossible to use the bus and be on time, because the bus was never on time, it was always late.

The bus app with the time schedule was never accurate, and I am not exaggerating, the app said that the bus was coming in 10 minutes, and arrived with 20 minutes delay, or it used to say that the bus was coming in 3 minutes, and it never came. So many times I had to drive them to the activities by car, that is to drop them and then come back to take them. The same during the high school when my daughters had to go to private lessons, and in the weekends for sports competitions, or they have to give exams, and when they took the bus they were always late, so we tried to avoid it. So I would to have a more efficient public transport. Now I feel more conscious about the environment, and since Thessaloniki is a medium size city and sometimes the distances by walk are big, it would be really nice to have infrastructure for cycling, but this in Greece is a utopia. There is no infrastructure at all, so I do not think is realistic to think in a near future where we can move in the city with the bicycle. I feel very sad about this, because Thessaloniki is a very nice city and it would be nice to be able to move with the bicycle. There is also an issue with safety, in my family we do not use anything with two wheels because the streets are very dangerous in Thessaloniki.

We have discussed the issue of transport a lot with my two daughters, it something very important for us, particularly for one of my daughters who has to commute very often to Evstratia. And the three of us agree that a bicycle is not an option because it is not safe. Drivers in Thessaloniki do not care about people on two wheels. I believe that it is important to think more positively of the future, and be sensitive to the environment, like we became more familiar with recycling, we can try to make changes with transport but there is no infrastructure. But I would like to make the future of my children better. I was grow up in a very closed society, but my parents because they emigrated to Germany for work, they had a different mentality from Greece, so when they came back they were different and this I supposed influenced the way I think. My father in particular was more innovative in his way of thinking.

Quotes

Yes, now I cannot get inside the bus because I have to stay on the stairs because it is full, it is not ok! And this happens very frequently in the only bus that passes by my house, it is dangerous.

Keywords

Non-reliable bus, unsafe streets, family struggle, no green spaces, no infrastructure

RL7_GR04, Greece, A working mother struggles with transport in west Thessaloniki



Narrative

I am a 48-year-old woman who lives in Stavroupoli, and I grew up also in the west part of Thessaloniki, in Evosmo, so mobility from the west to the centre and east part of the city was always an issue for me. When I was 18 years old and studied at Aristotle University, which is in the east side of the city centre, I started the “calvary” of public transport, since I had to take two buses to get to the University. Even when I was in high school, I had to take the bus because it was far away from home, but it was such a bad experience that I decided to walk to the high school which was a 2 kilometre distance, but it was ok because I was young. Getting to place by bus was always an awful experience, because both my parents worked and could not take me to places, I had to find alone a way to get first to school and then to the University. So I walked a lot for moving around the city since a young age. When I studied at the University, I had to take everyday 5-6 buses because everything was in the centre, sometimes when I went out at night I had to stay until the next day because there were not night buses. But I always try to avoid the buses as much as I could and walk. Later on, there was also the problem that many areas in west Thessaloniki that are very close together, for instance Evosmos, Hilioupoli, Kordelio, Evkarpia, were not connected by bus, so you had to go through the city centre and take several buses. Transport in west Thessaloniki is really difficult, so I had to walk a lot. But now that I have my own family, two children, as a working mom, things are very different, I cannot walk as much because of the time constraints, and because physically is not that easy.

Also, with my children things are different from my generation, my parents' generation was not afraid or had not other choice that to leave children find their way, get to places by their own. I do not leave my children to do the same things I used to do when I was their age (12 and 13 years old), and I fear for their safety. My children are now at an age that they want to be mobile, they want to go to the city centre for entertaining, so transport is an issue in my family. I do not drive for personal reasons, only my husband uses the family car, I would not use anyway the car to get to the city centre because you cannot find parking or the parking is too expensive.

Because my job was always in the centre, transport made my life very difficult. I had to wake up really early in the morning, and prepare breakfast and my children to get them to school all that in time to catch up the bus to get to my job. So it was very stressful for me, particularly when my children were small, because I had to wake 3 hours ahead to prepare my children and take the bus that takes 50 minutes to get to the city centre, and the same stress when I finished from the job and I had to return to my house, to arrive on time to take the children from the kindergarten, from the grandparents etc., and to get on time at home to do all the house chores, since in Greece women typically are responsible for the house and children. Also, because my husband has his own business he has not time to help with transport, so I had to use the bus with my children and when I was pregnant, and I faced problems as well with people mentally and attitudes, people in general would not give me a seat even when I was pregnant or carried in my arms small children. Even when I had a serious problem with my need and I had to wear a cast, I had a huge issue with transport because buses are not made for people who have mobility problems, I could not get up to the bus. When the Covid pandemic started, I stopped using the bus because of safety reasons, so I had to look for a way to get to my job, so I decided to buy an electrical bicycle. I use it with a lot of fear, because in Greece there is

not a bicycle culture, both from pedestrians who walk in the bicycles lines and from drivers. They do not pay attention to bicycles. So I use only for my job, it is also a matter of where it to park it because I am afraid they will steal it, in my job I take it inside the building because it folds, but it is a shame I cannot take for shopping or other activities because I am afraid. Although, I started using the electrical bicycles because I had not other transport alternative for work, I can see now that it has many benefits, you keep yourself physical active, move very fast, you do not sweat and smell, and it is safer than the electrical scout, so I recommend everybody, especially to those who live in east areas which have a better infrastructure for bicycles, because the west area where I live has a very poor infrastructure. I think if more people would use an electrical bicycle, the environment would be cleaner in the city. We have discussed with my husband also the possibility to use one, but there are other difficulties since for his job he has to carry stuff, so it would have to be an electrical bicycle that can carry stuff, and I do not know if there is such and probably it is too expensive. Money, I think is an issue for most people I talk to when it comes using an electrical bicycle. For our family it would be ideal if the metro is finished, we could easily and safely commute to the centre. I think that when my children will study at the University, it would be ideal for them to use the bicycle but I would be very afraid, because it is not safe, very often people in bicycles in Thessaloniki are killed or hit.

Quotes

The buses keep getting smaller, ok some streets are small...but a small single bus that covers all the west part of Thessaloniki up to the University, so basically goes through the whole city cannot accommodate the people. This and the endless hours we wait. For the car that is illegally parked in the street, there is not police control or organisation of urban transport to facilitate transport, and bus drivers are also stuck in the 80s.

Maybe it helps me to take decisions that from a very young age I had to solve my problems on my own, whether they were transport, or other problems at school...

Keywords

Self-efficacy, safety, inefficient buses, time constrains, family needs

RL7_GR05, Greece, Electric scooter and awareness

Narrative



I am a 57-year-old woman, living in the area of Neapoli in Thessaloniki. I work at City College, as a cleaner. It's something that I have in me, as I generally like to see things clean and tidy. For many years I worked in an office so I also had everyday transportation. I was in the health sector, specifically in the drug/pharmacy department where I was an administrative employee. Now, commuting for me has always been a problem because I also want to do things that are as environmentally friendly as possible. I used to take the car, but except for the fact that we have a serious issue with parking in Thessaloniki, I was also thinking that we are constantly bombarding our environment with gasoline when we have to go here and there, so I said "I have to find a solution". And I found it. I got an electric scooter. I said, "Just like the others do, especially the young people, I will do it too." I also thought that I am not burdening the environment". I was thinking about getting a bike, but I thought that people will see me on the bike and will say "Why is this grandma riding a bike?". So I got an electric scooter and I go to work every day with it. I am not burdening the environment which is very important. However, due to the fact that I have 2 children and 5 grandchildren who live in the eastern part of Thessaloniki, and the fact that I live in the western part, in Neapoli, I have my daughter drive me to her house, or I have to take my car to go to Plagiari, where my son lives. I don't like that I do this. I have seen some documentaries about electric cars and I am very positive because the environment is constantly burdened.

We also moved a lot in the past, as my husband is in the military. I have stayed in Athens, but I have also lived in very clean environments, for example, I have stayed in Mytilini where the environment was nice and clean, there was not too much traffic, and so on. I have also stayed in Katerini and other smaller towns and I can definitely say that here in Thessaloniki the environment is more burdened and we all have to do something about it. We do our best. If these electric cars come out and they are at affordable prices, I'm really thinking about getting one and driving around, to visit my kids at least, because for close distances I have found the solution, I have the electric scooter.

I will also use the scooter to go for a coffee with my friends. I have had it for 5 months. With the scooter I will also go to the city centre from Neapoli. I will not take any other means of transport. Only when I have to go on a long distance, let's say to go to my children, who are in Thermi and Plagiari, where going by scooter is not possible. Despite this, drivers are unfortunately not aware, and there are also no proper roads. Unfortunately, it often happens that I drive on a bike path and somebody is just sitting there, standing, or taking pictures. I tell him to go away, but he sits there.

We don't even have the awareness, unfortunately. I think there should be a briefing, regardless of the fact that there are no bike lanes and so on. Besides, let me say another thing. When I decided to get an electric scooter, I sat down and read. It's on the internet, you can find rules of conduct for the driver who has an electric scooter. The people that I talk with tend to say "Come on now, it is not a big deal. Why should I read the rules? I can drive as I please". Yes, but it's not like that, as you have to drive on the right side, you have to give priority to the car, you have to wait, you have to stop at the traffic light. The rules mention specific things. You can't say "Hey, I take my scooter and I am ready to go". Since I also drive a car, I know, let's say, some things. Because some people, that have not driven before, don't even know the basics. There are also some bus lines that serve the area where I live in. It has happened a few times that I took the bus but I regretted it as it gets crowded. One is on top of the other and you also have to wear a protective

mask. I will do it if I have to, but that's why I got an electric scooter. To be independent and not have such issues. But for sure, there is available public transport.

My husband moves with his car, although we have discussed it many times and I have informed him about the benefits of walking. Nevertheless, he is basically moving by car. There are also some conflicts related to me moving with the scooter. At first, everybody said "Be careful, you'll get hit", "You're paying attention, but others aren't paying attention to you", "Be careful not to hit the brakes too hard, as you will fall" and things like that. This is due to the fact that I was the first and only person in my close circle that has moved to more sustainable practices. We all have environmental awareness but for my son and daughter the car is a necessity as they live in rural areas outside the city. The daily transportation of every one of us plays a crucial role in the environment. I remember when I was in Athens, before 36-37 years, and I saw the smog, I said that something should be done to stop car use. Then there is the matter of what we eat. How much are we polluting the environment in general? Even the fish, which some say is good for our health. How can you eat fish? The sea is polluted. My environmental awareness comes from my father. He always talked to us about ecology, taking care of the environment, and not littering. My dad has always been like this, and I've had this since I was little. For example, when the municipality put recycle bin in the area, I was very happy. Also, the recycled batteries and devices. Everything matters. The municipality could create more kid care units, especially for young children so that the parents will not have to use their cars that often. This is a big problem in my area. In addition, electronic boards that inform the passengers about the time of arrival of the bus should be installed at all bus stops. However, I believe that all of us should work towards this change by participating and getting informed, and not just wait for the government to resolve this issue.

Quotes

Now, commuting for me has always been a problem because I also want to do things that are as environmentally friendly as possible.

It has happened a few times that I took the bus but I regretted it as it gets crowded.

There are also some conflicts related to me moving with the scooter.

Keywords

Electric scooter, past experience in other cities, social stigma, family influence

RL7_GR06, Greece, Single mother with a rough life

Narrative

I am a 63-year-old recently retired woman and I used to work as a cleaner in CITY College. Basically, I studied at a fine arts school and I was a painter, but I got a pension as a cleaner. I am a mother of two girls, I am divorced, so I raised the children alone, with the help of my parents while they were alive of course. After that, I was alone. I worked two jobs. so my children lacked both me and also a male role model. I didn't have time myself, as I worked in the afternoon as well, so I did not even have time to see my children. So, as you understand, my life was very difficult, in terms of how I could get by financially, and how to provide for myself and my children, as we were a single-parent family. Beyond that, I didn't feel that I had any help that I should have, social/economic help, as a single-parent family. It didn't exist, I was alone and I really felt alone. So my first concern was to secure the basics. Everything else was a luxury that I couldn't afford. We did not have a car, as my ex-husband took it after the divorce. I also do not know how to drive a manual car. I used to know how to drive an automatic back in the day when I was living in the US. Now, regarding everyday transportation, I used to walk to the art workshops where I worked in the afternoon, whether they were in Meteora, or in Polichni. For commuting to the city centre, for my morning work, I used to take the bus. The service was very good in the past. However, in recent years, using the bus has become a very big problem. You have to leave an hour earlier, to calculate the time you have to wait for the bus. It's a whole trip and you waste too much time. It has become unbearable, not difficult, unbearable. And in the times we live in, when we also have the coronavirus, waiting for the bus for a very long time can create issues. More precisely because the bus is always late, too many people gather at the stop and when they enter it gets really crowded. But there is the coronavirus. I mean it is sure that some disease will be transmitted, as unfortunately, not everyone wears a mask on the bus. At my age, which is a dangerous age, I know friends of mine who don't even get on the bus, so they cannot go downtown. Well, I still hold on, but some can't, as they have multiple problems with their legs.

My children also prefer walking over the bus, so they usually walk to go to their jobs. My older daughter has a car, but she walks to work as it is close to our house. Maybe I passed it on to them, as I took them to different art exhibitions and we went from one to the other on foot, and they learned to walk. Walking however can be unsafe. I am lucky that I have not been robbed on the street. Because it has happened that they took my purse on the bus. The taxi option is also very unaffordable. You used to pay 3 euros for a short trip. Now it has become very expensive so I don't usually take taxis. Sometimes in my area taxis are also very difficult to find, and you have to wait for a very long time on the side of the road. It happened that I took a taxi once or twice, but only when I was forced to, as there is no bus service late at night. I'll either walk or take the bus. I am also constantly looking for friends that have a car or whose husbands can drive us around. The cost is a major issue in my close circle, as our friends always consider the cost of gas when they move around. I would consider more alternative and sustainable solutions for

my transportation, if we were more organised of course, as it is in other developed European countries. If there were cycle paths and electric scooter lanes, then yes. My cousin Areti, which also lives in Neapoli, uses an electric scooter but I am very afraid of it.

She does this for financial reasons and in order not to take the car, due to the gas price and the fact that there is no parking in the city. But the scooter is dangerous. For example, if there were proper roads and cycle paths where the electric scooters could be safe, then of course it would be very good. But unfortunately, there is no such infrastructure. Only in Nea Paralia, there is a bike path. It does not exist elsewhere. So you rule out cycling. How to get around? To bike from Neapoli to downtown by bike? It is unsafe.

I believe and hope that the subway that is under construction would solve many issues. However, it should be extended to our area, as there are no plans for a stop here.

Quotes

My life was very difficult, in terms of how I could get by financially.

In recent years, using the bus has become a very big problem.

Unfortunately not everyone wears a mask on the bus.

The taxi option is also very unaffordable.

Keywords

Difficult life, coronavirus, walking, expensive, single mother, no car, unaffordable taxis

RL7_GR07, Greece, Young woman with essential tremor

Narrative

I am a 22-year-old student in the History and Archaeology department at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. I am the middle child of a five-member family and we live all together in Stavroupoli, where I was born and raised. I and my sister are university students, and due to the fact that neither of us has a driver's license, we do move around mainly by bus. Unfortunately, in Thessaloniki, there is no other choice of public transport,

like for example a tram. However, most of the time I will choose to walk for my everyday needs. For example, I like to walk to the university or for the different things that I have to do in the city. For me, walking also makes me calm, especially when it is combined with music, and it helps my well-being. So, in general, I believe that I and my sister have a relatively sustainable way to move around daily. Now, regarding my parents, they are mostly using their car. This is happening both when we are going somewhere as a family, but also for their individual needs daily. Especially my father uses the car a lot, as it is necessary for his work, where he regularly has to transport large parcels in the city. So according to this, I am not very sure on how he can use a more sustainable way of transport, like for example the bus. Now, except for the university, when I want to go out for entertainment purposes I will again use the bus most of the time. However, if a friend of mine has a car, which is pretty rare, then I will choose to go with it, as in Stavroupoli there is no bus service after midnight, as for example happens in the central and eastern areas of the city. So, if the car is not an option and I want to return from downtown to Stavroupoli, I will have to take a taxi or go on foot. Most of those times I prefer the taxi for safety reasons, as Stavroupoli is not generally safe at night. Ideally, I would like very much to move around with my bike, but unfortunately, there is not a single bike lane on the west side of the city in order to connect Stavroupoli with the city centre. I do not trust our roads and I feel unsafe using the bike in between the traffic, so I end up having the bus as the only option. Fortunately, there is a bus stop very close to my house but the frequency of the bus service is very poor. The waiting time at the bus stop is one of the problems. In addition, the fact that the city centre bus line goes through various neighbourhoods until it reaches its destination makes the bus to get very crowded. It has happened before that I was unable to board 2 or 3 full-capacity buses until there was a bus that I could finally board. Taxis are also available, but they are not affordable for me or my family. My main problem however is the fact that I have a small disability, as I have a condition that is called essential tremor which practically means that my hands are constantly shaking. This poses a huge problem when I am using the bus, as it is very difficult for me to hold on to the bars or the hangers on the bus. Also, it has happened before that people do not give me their seat on the bus as my disability is not an obvious one and they do not believe me. My hand also got caught in between the doors of the bus, which in general is very bad, especially for my condition. So I would like a lot of things to change. First of all, I would like a more frequent bus service. Secondly, I would like more public transport choices, for example, a tram or the long-awaited subway. I believe that awareness is one of the most important things that should change. Awareness and respect regarding disability and implementation of the rules inside the bus, regarding priority seating, etc. We have to understand that the planet is our home and that we are constantly bombarding it. It is extremely important for everyone to understand that individual change to more sustainable ways has a huge overall impact on the environment. I believe that the future is in the hands of every single one of us. As a family, I believe that we have an environmental mindset. I am the most “green” one, as for many years now I do recycling, I use metal straws and I choose reusable and bio-disposable products. The way that I was raised played an important role in that. We grew up using public transport and learning about the benefits of recycling. Using the bike is also a “family business” and I believe that even my parents would introduce it in their daily transportations, if there were bike lanes of course. However, being sustainable can be costly. Not just for transportation, but in general. So, I believe that the cost combined with

the lack of public transport are the main factors that inhibit change towards more environmentally friendly transport practices today.

Quotes

Most of the time I will choose to walk for my everyday needs” “unfortunately there is not a single bike lane in the west side of the city.

I have a condition that is called essential tremor.

We have to understand that the planet is our home.

Keywords

Essential tremor, walking, bike lanes, respect, disability, sustainable family

RL7_GR08, Greece, Public transport quality & perceived accessibility.

Narrative

I am 26 years old, and I grew up and live in Stavroupoli all these years. I have 2 brothers, an older by 3 years and a younger by 2 years, who also live together in Stavroupoli with me and our parents. I currently work in a pastry shop in the West, like my sister who is working in another pastry store. My brother is unemployed at the moment, my parents on the other hand work in a large supermarket group; my mother in the West and my father outside of Thessaloniki. My father, right now, unfortunately, because he has some health issues, can't use public transport. So, the car is his only solution right now. My mother on the other hand uses the buses to go to work, which makes her tired because she is also at that age when health starts to deteriorate. I imagine you know how it is; after the fatigue of work, you have to wait for the bus that sometimes is not on time, and the weather does not help, especially now in winter with the cold and rain a man can get sick. Now for my brother, when he worked mostly he used taxis to tell you the truth because he worked at night and there were no buses at that time, and he couldn't walk because he was standing for 8 hours so that he would get even more tired. My sister on the other hand, when she has to go to work she goes on foot, because it is next to our house, but also for walks in the other, either in the centre or East she uses the bus. But again as I said before,

unfortunately, the buses in Thessaloniki and Stavroupoli, to speak specifically about this area, are never on time. They have their routes, but they never apply. Now as far as it goes for me, over the years, I would always walk and wear my headphones, nothing else. It relaxes me too much, it calms me down immeasurably because it's just me and no one else. And especially when I get nervous I'll take them and start walking, I don't care where I go... it relaxes me immeasurably, I think more clearly than being at home with all the commotion or when getting on a bus and wanting to calm down and hearing everyone shouting or playing music and the driver just "sleeping" and just driving, while I don't have to listen to what everyone is talking. Only if I didn't have too much time, to make a long distance, I take the buses. Unfortunately, no matter how much someone wants to use public transport in Greece, they can not, because if it is hot on the bus, as they never have windows, and it is very crowded, so you can get tired just being in there. For the cold, they also they do not have heating. It's also too crowded for a bus that passes every 20 minutes. And I will speak specifically about when I was studying and I had to go to Sindos, which sometimes I just did not go because I knew I would not be able to get in, it was just panic because there was a bus every half hour, and if you have a 08:00 class and the bus starts 7:30, you necessarily missed the class. And there were a lot of students at the stop, who wanted to get on the first bus that left because they were just going to miss class, and most of them might be absentees, the others might be going for fun, but it doesn't matter, you still use it because you have a purpose. And unfortunately, it doesn't help. Whether for fun, if you want to go out and have fun and so on, and you want to come back late, there is no bus to go back to your area. You will have to pay for a taxi, which as we all know, the car does not help the environment. And you have to either walk back at night, which unfortunately is dangerous or take a taxi or call your father, on the other hand, tell him "come pick me up so we can go home", wake him up, while the other can work the next day. Unfortunately, as I said my father has a health issue, so wherever he goes he uses the car. He cannot use any other means. He goes with my mother again by car, for all the groceries shopping. If my mother goes by herself she will go to a nearby shop on foot so that she can get a few things so that she can carry them home afterwards. And as for me, fortunately, with my friend group, when it comes to going out most people have a car so we use it to be able to get off to go to the place we want to have fun. On the other hand, if I am alone, and as I said before, if I have time, I will take my headphones and go down to the centre on foot, or the East, if necessary. The bus unfortunately is chaos; they swear, they shout inside, and they are not clean. It is no longer worth taking public transport. They are never on time, you can sometimes wait half an hour and 40 minutes, which unfortunately has happened to me, and you are late to work. And just the same for the on the subject of fun. As for the bike, it would be very nice, and very useful, but unfortunately, we do not have bike paths there in Stavroupoli, especially Stavroupoli, we have nothing. And to take it through the road, unfortunately, there are many accidents, because the drivers do not look at them. Many children have lost their lives simply because the one who is on the street ignores them. I would definitely like it if there were more regular buses so that people know that every 5-10 minutes there is a bus that will take me to the area I want to my location, yes, that would be the best I think for the environment and for the whole world because most unfortunately like me, we have a license and as the situation is we do not have a vehicle to move, because of the finances. Also, right now I would like to own a motorbike. Which is the easiest to go, and the quickest to be able to go somewhere. But unfortunately, I don't have the license, and as

we said, they need the money. You prioritise some other more important things than getting a vehicle or a license. I think at the moment we are far behind in mobility because most people don't even care. And everyone just uses the car to be able to be on time, to avoid the people who get on the buses, because they may also be afraid of the buses because unfortunately, they steal inside the buses and the others do not notice you or even if they see it they will not speak, because again they are afraid, so most if they have a vehicle they use it. As I said, it would help a lot with the bus or even the bike paths. To enable someone, those who have a bicycle to know that they are safe so that they can move so that the pollution in the environment is reduced. But unfortunately, I don't see it happening anytime soon. And it's going to take a long time to get here.

Quotes

Now as far as it goes for me, over the years, I would always walk and wear my headphones...it calms me down immeasurably because it's just me and no one else. The bus unfortunately is chaos.

We have a license and as the situation is we do not have a vehicle to move, because of the finances.

Keywords

Poor finances, chaotic busses, dangerous roads, walking, safety in public transport

RL7_GR09, Greece, A senior's perspective on lack of environmental respect.

Narrative

I was born in 1950, so I turned 72 this year. I do housework, I'm retired basically now, and for the moment I am self-sustaining. I move as much as I can and where I can by public means, by taxi, and not very often, with buses which are difficult to utilise because our municipality has many residents and especially where we live it gathers a lot of people, some go out for errands, work, entertainment. The only thing that makes it difficult for me is that the buses become crowded so I avoid them. Although the buses that facilitate us here are four or five I can say. It is of Efkarpia, Oreokastro, Stavroupoli, and Lagada. However, they have a lot of people, and this bothers me a lot, especially now with the

coronavirus. I am always standing on the bus, so the taxis may be safer. And I do not consider them safe because the drivers who operate them do not take all the safety measures for Covid. During the entire period of the coronavirus that I had to take a taxi, two drivers seemed to have taken safety measures for themselves and for the customer who came in, otherwise, the rest put the mask on only after they got in and I was fearful due to this reason. I like walking, but I can't do it for a long period of time. I will walk but on the return, I will have a little difficulty. I seek it because I think the movement is good for the body and I do not want to give it up. In the old days, the routes buses were more sparse, but I think that now they have become more often. I don't know if they're trying to improve transportation, but I do not see it improved, what I notice is very dirty the buses inside. A lot of people enter and it is of all kinds here the area due to the psychiatric hospital comes various people with problems. Many times to avoid the world, when I see that the bus is too full I do not go in I wait for the next one to come. If the one that comes does not suit me and I want to go to the market, I take it and go down halfway and from there I take something else that also comes more empty. From a health issue point of view, I always protect myself. I definitely wear a mask and in fact on the bus inside I wear two, which started while the masks were mandatory, now they are not, and not many wear them, so I am forced to wear a double mask to protect myself. I hold the handle with an antiseptic wipe, with a bare hand I do not hold it, and I never sit down. I may fall from my feet, my legs hurt and fall down but I will not sit because they usually crowd towards the middle of the bus and I move forward. Because I go to Theagenio for a health issue, where they are doing rehab there are many addicts in the area trying to get drugs. Here in Stavroupoli those who come to do their treatment in Okana come to actually find drugs as well. Everywhere there is fear, when you go around you have to keep your eyes open. On a personal level, I would like to also be able to move faster because there are days when there is too much traffic on the road. How it will happen I do not know, but hopefully, the metro will start operating soon, because the construction has damaged the whole market of Thessaloniki's centre. If the means of transport are improved, I think the pollution of the environment will also be reduced, because when you go to work and do an hour to get there by bus while it is a twenty-minute or a quarter of an hour drive with the vehicle, you are forced to get the vehicle. All this is a burden on the environment, the fewer cars in circulation the better it is for the environment, I think so. They are also very old cars circulating that need replacement. These are all aggravating the environment. I think these should be replaced immediately, they say they will but again they bring old vehicles from Europe. When people are barely getting by, they won't have enough fuel, they will be covered with blankets with clothes and they will be forced to burn anything in the heater to keep warm, which is very dangerous for us and the environment. All this is a chain. The standard of living of the Greeks has to rise, there is no average Greek now, and there are two polar opposites. In general, we do not respect our environment. The municipality has made a park for animals, which might not suitable for everyone, so there must be more in other areas because many people take their pets to other parks and they litter those parks. The municipality has made the parks make the city as green as it can be, but they do not take care of them as they should. But we also have to take care of the environment. I see that some young people who are going are more careful than the older ones who refuse to pay attention to them and throw trash down. We have to make efforts to improve ourselves. The municipality needs to take care of the trees that they do not prune every year anymore for example. How a person is formed starts from the family,

from their root, so I can tell you about myself and my family. The way you're used to your environment, I think you're passing it on to the next generation. That's where I think what you're telling me now lies because it has families that are broken, that have problems. I think you cultivate in this house, through the family and from the environment like friends, acquaintances, and relatives, I think all this contributes to good conduct.

Quotes

I move as much as I can and where I can by public means.

I am always standing on the bus, so the taxis may be safer.

I like walking, but I can't do it for a long period of time.

In general, we do not respect our environment.

Keywords

Crowded bus, safety, walking, health issues, environmental respect, financial issues

RL7_GR10, Greece, Accessibility and mobility in single-parent families

Narrative

I am 39 years old, I live in Stavroupoli, Thessaloniki, I have been here for about 10 years on and off, because we also lived in the village. I like Stavroupoli, in general, I have no issue, but if you look at the details surely some things would like improvement. I raised a son and now I am raising a baby girl, strollers are not easy to access and pass through the streets, and the sidewalks are not good, blocked with cars or trees or columns. There are too many cars parked up and down everywhere, I would definitely like more underground garages if possible. Here the area has a lot of traffic, a lot of vehicles, and a lot of buses, but there are no other solutions so far. If the metro started operating that would be fantastic and I would walk only 10-15 minutes to get to the station to get down to the centre. I would not have a problem because I imagine it would be more accessible and faster. Now there are 2-3 buses that I can take to go to the city centre, but it is always full,

people are nervous and it is not a nice experience at all. If I get down by car it is okay it is done, but parking is impossible. I don't work, but here I can go everywhere on foot, I have no issue. The post office, supermarkets, parks and anything else I need are nearby. For personal fun, I do not have time to go to bars, shops etc in the surrounding areas. On foot, about 8-10 minutes, I can reach places to go out with the kids like the Lazaristes monastery. My son goes to football which is even closer, and we have a playground if we want to walk, I do not think we need anything more. It has buses for sure, in the centre, you get by bus, to Ampelokipous, and Evosmos as well. Only to Polichni, it is a bit tough, only there, but I think if there was a metro it would be perfect. I don't think they could put any tram, nothing since it doesn't fit, with so much traffic. Maybe if it were something more innovative, other things would have to be changed. Let's say an electric and faster bus, the roads have to be changed, the cars have to be reduced, there is a big change because it is all narrow and very crowded. With the commutes, I don't know what else could be done. I see how the electric scooters pass, I am afraid for them because I am also a driver, I think it is a little dangerous for them, on the roads, they could have their lane let's say as cyclists have. In other cities, you have bicycle paths, you have to tear down half the city to fit all the vehicles. If they can find a place or a way to put bike paths, it would be great. I don't know the scooters or other electric vehicles, I think they should have something special, I don't think that goes together let's say with cars. I don't go out as far as I would like because I know it's tough, so, we are more limited here in our neighbourhood. I have a car, but again with the traffic, I think twice about whether I want to go or not. There has to be a financial incentive, to buy an electric, greener vehicle, or use it. Outside Greece, in whatever country you go to, such as Slovakia, where I am from and you do not see an old car, there is none, everything is new. We are not saying that these are more sustainable, they are not. Still, it is obvious that people are probably better financially or have more options to get something new. The new can be something more ecological, here it is very difficult to go forward if people don't have jobs or don't get paid enough. I am not Greek, but I have heard about the Greeks that from small ones they throw garbage on the street, that is, they do not care that they are outside their house, their house is spotless but what happens outside they do not care. I like cars, I like regular cars with gas etc, but to make my commute daily I would use something electric. But not all vehicles should become electric. Because then there is the issue of how do you charge the battery. They could put something that with friction when the wheels turn, makes more energy to charge itself. Ideas exist; an electric car that turns the wheels can charge again and again without using current, it's incredible. When they make something like this I will buy it, but hopefully, the cost is not extreme. We need to change the economy in order for this to happen.

Quotes

Here the area has a lot of traffic, a lot of vehicles, and a lot of buses, but there are no other solutions so far.

Maybe if it were something more innovative, other things would have to be changed.

I have a car, but again with the traffic, I think twice about whether I want to go or not.



Keywords

Inaccessible pavements, traffic, crowded buses, lack of parking, holistic change, innovation

RL7_SE01, Sweden, Aena: My electric wheelchair makes me feel free

Narrative

My name is Aena, I am 55 years old, living in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I am married and have two grown-up children living at home. My mom lives in the same area as me. Before we moved here, I had to use the car to get to work, now I can take my electric wheelchair and it is so good. I try to avoid using the car, because it is expensive to fill up gas, and because I think a lot about the environment. I got my commitment to the environment from Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) course, we talked about this then- and it stuck with me. I have mixed experiences from using transport service. One time I were to go to a city south of the city I live in, the driver did not know the way and the destination. He did not listen to me; he also had immigrant background and did not speak Swedish so well. He tried to get information over the phone from the transport leaders where to go, he hung up and decided to go anyway. I was too late for the meeting and had to go home again. He did not listen to me. Can it be because I was a woman? That's the way I am looked upon by them, it's so sad. It happens a lot. It's not a specific situation, it's enough if you just get the stare, both men and women do that.

I can use my electric wheelchair to move around in the city, it is much smoother compared with the car. I go shopping and do activities in the e-wheelchair and it is so good. If I am using the car, I take my e-wheelchair to the garage, but the neighbours are upset with me because I need to park my wheelchair there and they feel it's in the way. I think of the environment, so this is good, I don't have to use the car as I had previously. It still takes the same amount of time to go from A to B. Buss is not for me; I have bad balance and I can't find the seat fast enough. The problem is also to get from home to the bus stop, on crutches, that does not work. I have used a transport service. I went to a city outside the city I live in, it was snowy and bad weather, it went fine on the way there. But while there I was offered to go with the others in their bus back home, I said OK. It was so hard to get on the bus, it wasn't accessible, then once home he let me off outside my residential area, it was very difficult for me to get home. I tend to refrain from some trips if I can't manage myself and will be reliant on others, then I would rather stay at home. For example, they would help me go to a meeting abroad, but I don't know how accessible the bus is and they say, "we will help you". Then I ask, "how will you help me, will you carry

me?” So, I had to back off, I thought once at the destination we would also go by bus and so I did not dare to go only because of this. If I have my electric wheelchair, I am not so dependent upon others. However, I can't use it on the buses or trains since it is too big.

To be able to get an e-wheelchair you need a parking shed, called a “bread jar”, otherwise you will not get it. Apparently, there is a conflict between the municipality and the region who should provide these sheds. They are used for safe parking and for charging. I know people stand in queue to get one. They are isolated or forced to buy an e-scooter privately – but then repairs will be at their expense. It's not easy. I have a neighbour who has bought one privately, and now there is something wrong with it. He must fix it himself; it will cost a lot. I was fortunate to get one of those sheds because I could take over a shed from a person I knew. It was a process to get it in place. It costs 200 SEK/month because I use electricity. I must pay a subscription fee, 65 SEK a month for the scooter. It is a lot to pay for someone who is on sick pay. It should only be charged those who have a job, there should be a difference, I think.

Once you have the e-wheelchair, you feel free. I get fresh air, and I do something for my children and grandchildren – for the environment. In the beginning, people used to stare at me since I was in the wheelchair, but now I don't care. This also has happened when I had small children and took them in my wheelchair – people tend to think as a disabled person you are incapable parent. People don't have to say anything, a stare is enough.

I while ago my e-wheelchair got stolen from the shed, this meant I had to stay at home – I couldn't go anywhere. Our car is in a garage quite some distance from my home, so it takes lot of effort to take the car. I had to stay at home several weeks until I got a new one. My main concern for travel is electricity, what if we get a power failure? I saw a TV-series called “Släckt Sverige” (Lights Out, Sweden), and I thought, what would this mean for me? Then I am stuck at home. My children would not be able to help me, maybe if I could use a manual wheelchair, they could push me places. I don't have one now. I could get an arm pedalled bicycle, a thing you attach to my wheelchair, that would work. I have seen them, but have not tried them, and they are also very expensive.

Quotes

The economic situation is terrible for those who do not work, even those who work part-time, it is also not so good. I have a colleague, he has a very low salary, mine is also not that high, but it works. He has half-time sick pay and the salary is not so high. He travels by bus here, it costs SEK 600-700, now he has chosen to work from home. Maybe it's because of the costs I don't know. It's tough. If you only have sick pay then you get SEK 6000-7000, it's not much.

I know some people who are in my association, we go swimming and it's free, we have a paid bath manager, so the bath is free. But if my friend uses the transportation service, then she must pay 40 + 40 SEK, then she chooses to stay at home. And that's sad. If she were to take part of cooking activities we arrange, then she also must pay SEK 80, then she chooses to stay at home.

Keywords

Wheelchair, regulations, electricity shortage, accessible transport, transport costs, pursuit of independence, time, economic vulnerability

RL7_SE02, Sweden, Eva: “Think about the exhausts”, my daughter says

Narrative

My name is Eva, I am 52 years old, and I live with my teenage daughter and husband on the countryside outside a middle-sized Swedish city. I work half time, not from home, I always must go to work. I have like 20 km one way, 40 km a day. A normal day, my husband also travels to the nearby city like I do, my daughter cycles to school about 2,5 km from home.

In my family we think about sustainability quite a lot. We do like this, we have one car, it's an old faithful from 2008, just an ordinary petrol car. Nothing fancy. We have 4 bicycles, and I have an electrical bike. My daughter is allowed to go with the school bus, you apply for this, but she and her father cycle each day. Now when she is older, she cycles home herself. This is a rather continuous environmental and health strategy. She could take the bus from home but does not. So, on general, we do not use the bus at all. For a reason that is, if she takes the bus, she must wait at school for 35 minutes, and this made me angry. It's about having to adjust to the buses that goes from our place to a school in the city, they thought it was beneficial to pick up the older kids so they can get to school in time, but it does not fit the younger kids who is only going to the school nearby. For us it is a health benefit to cycle every day. It looks like she is the only one cycling every day. All the other kids should also be able to cycle but they don't.

My husband cycles back home to work from home, it's a health benefit cycling with her to school every day. I do not work from home, so I go by car almost every day. Of course, I too think about health and environment, but if I am to take the bus, I need to go to the locality 2,5 km from home, then go by regional bus to the nearby city, then change to a local bus to get to work. I work outside city centre, it takes me 1.5 hours to go 20 km, I work part time so I must put into the same amount of time to get to work as I spend at work. That's one factor against the bus, the other factor, which is rather significant, is the ticket prices. It would mean 88 SEK to go to work by bus. We discuss this at home and my husband says, “but how much is it to have a car then!”, well I say, “I don't know”. If you add all costs, it equals out, but if you live like we do, and the distance and poor communications makes everyday life more difficult if you were to not have a car. It does not work. It may work economically and theoretically, but not practically, it does not. The

bus is not an option; it takes a lot more time and it feels like it costs more. My husband gets health benefits from cycling, and kids of today don't have the opportunity to be physically active, they cycled all winter with no fuss. And it feels great. In the countryside there are not so many environmentally friendly people or hippies that cycle for the climate, this is not how it works. They have got nice cars, and they use them. You don't know what they look like, you recognise their cars. Some drive like mad, some people is considerate when passing. Others pass rather narrow. I can feel parental anxiety about that. Those who live here are the ones who unfortunately go fastest.

I use my e-bike sometimes to go to work, it takes one hour each way, and I am very proud of this. What makes me do this then? Well, it depends on if I feel prepared, if I have everything with me, is the bike ok, battery fully charged. I have workout clothes, carry the charger so I can charge during the day at work. The big difference between the car and taking the bike in the morning is related to time for me, I need to have everything in order first. This is a thing about comfort, its super nice to get into the car. It's pre-heated, there is a big difference compared to getting on to the bike and there is like 6 degrees outside. At work I can bring the bike to my room, and shower at work. It's about comfort, a threshold to get over to get you on to the bike in the morning. And it does not end there, you are to cycle back in the afternoon, once you have done it, you feel great! The e-bike makes all the difference, you still get the physical activity, you still need to pedal. I don't know If you would cycle this far with my ordinary bike.

For me climate issues are about transporting oneself, how convenient it is and what it does cost. The bus routes have been changed too, and you can't do anything about it. They withdraw our stop and change the routes; I did not know who to contact about this – I lack know-how about these processes. Busses are for work commuters they say, but it's for school children, grown up people don't want to stand waiting for the bus in the rain. It's wishful thinking from the politicians. It's all about habits. I need to be less convenient, and travel by bike more when traveling locally, this should be agreed on in the family, that would help. "Think about the exhausts", my daughter says, she is influenced by Greta Thunberg. I am raised in a family that used the car a lot, I want to rebel against this. I am not sporty but feel sporty when on the bike. It feels great.

Quotes

Bus is almost not an option. It takes a lot longer, and it feels like it costs more, but I don't have a calculus (laughter).

It's not that when you're in the country like we live, there aren't that many green folks and hippies who cycle for the climate, they have nice cars, and they ride in those cars. That's how it feels, you're a bit odd if you ride cycles the way we do.

What kind of road do we have then? It is certainly not a cycle path, and there is no one whatsoever to make it easier for cyclists or people walking. And I'm angry about that.

I don't think so much about gas prices, more about how expensive it is to take the bus. I think it's a double standard, where messages are given to me, that I should think about

the environment and the wallet so on and I shall take the bus. How the hell does it work when you raise the prices so much. [...] I think about this as a wallet issue on those levels.

Keywords

Bus, electric bicycle, car, comfort, prices, health, rural

RL7_SE03, Sweden, Kerstin: “I think private car use is quite unnecessary”

Narrative

My name is Kerstin, I live with my two teenage daughters (16 and 18 years old) in a house in the countryside outside a middle-sized Swedish city. We have no car of our own for the moment, buses are 1,5 km from us, connections are ok. We have shared a car with our neighbours for some time, but they will sell it. It could work, but then I would have to buy all my food in the shop nearby and that I don't want. So, it does not work completely not having access to a car at all, so that is my main transport-related concern. There are a lot of advantages having a car but there are a lot of disadvantages, especially considering the emissions of private cars and stuff like that. So, I am thinking of potential solutions to this issue, as someone living in the countryside.

My children are both teenagers and go to the gymnasium in the nearby city, they go by bus every weekday. They cycle to the bus. Those days when we borrow a car, we can give them a lift to the bus if they are late. I may borrow a car to go to the shop or recycle in the nearby small population centre. Once or twice a month I go to town to shop or visit my mum. I try to take the bus, but shopping is the main hindrance for refraining from using the car. I use my e-bike for local trips. It's much easier to not use the car if you have the e-bike, the road is hilly, so with an ordinary bike its more of a training activity. I can also cycle longer distances. My e-bike takes me longer and I am not deterred from using the bike. It's great! My children don't have leisure activities anymore. But before when they had, it would not been possible to do without a car. So, then we carpooled with another family. This was a couple of years ago, now they can go by bus to visit friends and so. They get a bus card from the municipality they can use weekdays until 5pm. We need to buy an extended bus card for weekend and evenings.

I don't need a car since I am working from home. Having a car is expensive and costs a lot of money. Of course, I could afford a car but then I would have chosen not to prioritise things that I think are more important. But it's also for environmental reasons, because to have my own car I'd rather have an electric car, but I can't afford that. I'd

rather have the trickiness of dealing with not having a car than the financial uncertainty of what happens if the car breaks down.

The transport I need is dependent on the range of food I need, i.e., organic, and vegetarian food products. If the supply was in the immediate area and at a good price, I would not need a car. If I go into town, I have a better range and at prices that outweigh the price of gasoline. It is not possible to do with the bus, the bus journey takes too long and is too costly. I have said to my daughters that we may buy a car in a couple of years' time, when my youngest daughter will start practicing driving. It's been like this for a couple of years that we have had a car on and off, so they have gotten used to it. This includes that we don't follow the conventional path. There are no conflicts about this in the family. We have access to the means of transport we need. When we moved here, our bus stop was removed due to some reorganisation. If you have a car already, going by car is still the cheaper alternative compared with the bus. Even if you are alone in the car. This is backwards, I think, it should be at a price that is not a deterrent. We had meetings with the bus company and all they said was that there were too few people using the service and they wanted a more coherent route. It all sounded very logical, and they needed to prioritise. And they took away the opportunity to take the bike on the bus. Another thing is the road, it's poorly lit and with no shoulder. When my children cycle there, they don't want to use high wipers, traffic safety is not good, accidents may happen.

There is no service to get groceries delivered here, it's too far to the shop for that. But even if it were available, I still just move the transport from my car to someone else's. Is this better? I don't know. Its structural things, like why it is more expensive with food in our local shop, and why the shops in the city don't deliver here to us living remotely. One thing, carpooling would be good. But I understand why it's not ideal for the countryside. People live far from each other, and where should the car be parked? What has worked best so far is informal carpools between friends and relatives. We calculated costs and had a driving diary to keep track of mileage and costs. We did this informally, and we had a chat group to communicate about it, it worked well. We were building on relations not structural regulations.

For me the big change happened 2017-2018, I thought we had to stop flying because this is not working. I think it was around then it changed. Before that it was much more about economic uncertainty that you did not know how much the car would cost you if it broke down.

Quotes

How am I going to solve it without having a car myself? Because I don't really want a car.

There are a lot of advantages to having a car, but there are a lot of disadvantages as well, especially considering the emissions of private cars and things like that, so this is something I'm actively thinking about what solutions there are when you don't live in [name of city].

It feels like a financial uncertainty, my experience is that if you don't buy a very new car and I can't afford that, then costs pop up when you least expect it.

I think private car use is quite unnecessary.

Keywords

Car dependency, living remotely, sustainable shopping, electric bike, bus, traffic safety, training, carpool, transport costs, car ownership

RL7_SE04, Sweden, Fatima: A feeling of freedom, that's how I feel about the bike

Narrative

My name is Fatima, I am 48 years old, I live in a neighbourhood in the outskirts of a middle-sized Swedish city. I have two children, my daughter and my son are in their early twenties, both living at home. I work in a school, and have done so for 16 years or so, I have lived in this neighbourhood for a long time. I think it is beautiful here, lots of people with immigrant background. At first, I did not want to move here. I thought it was the end of the world, and the area had a reputation. Very much so, that it is dangerous and such. But the years I have lived here I have not seen anything like that. I have had good neighbours and never seen anything “live” myself. You hear things on the news though. I like it here, it's close to the bus, good cycling lanes and you can get around where you need to.

I either walk or cycle, very rarely take the bus. Sometimes I need to. My son cycles, he doesn't want to go by car or bus or anything like that. My daughter also cycles, but she is a bit lazy, so she uses VOI and bus. None of us have a driver's license. I have chosen not to have a driver's license. At first, I considered it, but it cost too much money, and you mess up nature and environment. And we don't live in a big city. You can get around without a car. If we were to go for longer trips, we would go by train, but we rarely travel.

And I managed the early childhood years without a car and drivers' license, so I can we manage without. You hear from people that it is such a freedom and that it is good to have a car and I just feel no, I have no need for it. I cycled, I had both children with me, and a dog and we went shopping and put everything in the cart. No problem, and you get exercise. We have always been walking. Day-care staff said, “we love your kids”, they never complain about being outside and having to walk, all the other kids complained they did not want to walk. My kids were used to walking. We went from our neighbourhood to the city centre, had a meal and maybe went to the movies and then walked back home. I felt it was important to teach my kids you can use your legs, and not be comfortable and

take the car. I think it's nice, I didn't like driving. I have fibromyalgia, so it would have made it easier for me to drive when I couldn't because of my body. But no, I manage.

We travel environmentally friendly, it's not hard I don't think. We take care of the environment based on what you can contribute with. I think it is important to get exercise and I have thought my kids that too. I have always liked to exercise; I have always cared about nature and animals. Many don't think about the environment, that they can cycle instead of taking the car. They don't know anything else than the car – that it's possible to cycle to town for example – people need to become aware of this. It's about their own responsibility, and parents need to teach their children active transport. I do what I can and will continue with this, and hope that I can help others to think about this so that we can keep our green forests and lakes and all that.

I would be able to afford a driver's license if it would be in my interest, but it's not, and it cost all the other things such as parking, garage, car, oil, petrol etc. I have the transports I need, bus and bike. I can go to the places I need without a problem. I even cycled to the nearby city, and then you must cycle on the car road – not all roads have a shoulder – sometimes it feels unsafe. But you must look out yourself and be alert. You never know if cars stop. Not all cyclists care about rules, and this means cyclists get a bad reputation, car drivers hate cyclists. Should be a form of driver's license for cyclists too. I have investigated this, but not everybody cares. I also taught my children cycling rules and how to behave, for their safety. I see bad behaviour every day. And you think it is unsafe.

My daughter likes the bus, and VOI, its more comfortable to take a VOI than the bike. It's cheaper to take a VOI compared with the bus, so the benefit is that you don't have to wait for the bus. And you can see where they are and then you leave, she feels it's nice.

In this neighbourhood many people take the car, many take the bus, mainly young people. Some cycle too but not much, because some have not learned to ride a bicycle. It was a municipality that teaches elderly ladies to ride bicycles, it was very good, they can get around without being dependent, and they don't know Swedish. They can't get a driver's license if they don't know the language. Then they can cycle instead. This summer the municipality had a bike repair workshop for an afternoon, that was great, not all have the funds to fix their bike or knows how, around here.

Quotes

After all, I made it through my toddler years without a driver's license and a car, things that people think is so convenient to have, so we can make it now too.

We went from [name of neighbourhood] to town and went to eat and went to the cinema and then we went home, we have always moved. I felt it was important to teach the children to get by on their own two feet and not be too lazy to drive.

A feeling of freedom, as everyone says about the car, that's how I feel about the bike. I get fresh air, I get to exercise, move, and be mindful. You can't be like that when you drive a car, then you must be very attentive.

Keywords

Neighbourhood with reputation; bicycle; walk; upbringing; exercise; costs; safety in neighbourhood; transport education

RL7_SE05, Sweden, Allen: My little use of the moped/car is not a problem

Narrative

My name is Allen, I am a 34-year-old man. I live with my family (my partner and two small children, a boy aged 6 years and a 2-year-old girl) and dog in in a middle-sized Swedish city. I work in the same area as I live. The children and I usually walk or cycle to kindergarten since we live so close to the school.

We also walk to the grocery store which is also nearby to where we live. However, to travel to work, which is about 1km or even less, I use a moped. I do not see it as a problem to use the moped to get to and from work as it is such a short distance between home and work. As the kids are still very young and do not have any other activities outside of school, we do not use the car that often. My partner is the one who uses the car and she mainly uses it to get to and from work. We also use the car if we are going to travel outside of the city we live in or if we need to go to a shopping mall far from the city centre during the weekends as it is more convenient and quicker than taking the bus. Because of how little we use the car, I do not think it is such a big problem to use it. For example, when my partner uses the car to get to work, she only travels a short distance and then parks it until she goes back home again. It is not like she spends the whole day driving it around unnecessarily like I often see people who work for the municipality and the police, who for instance often use a mini bus with only one person inside to patrol around the area all day emitting more gases than what we do when we use the car or when I use the moped. There are also people who drive A-tractors all day/night just for fun, big trucks that travel all over Sweden and the world delivering small packages. In relation to this observation, what big harm can I then, as an individual person, do to the environment with my little use of the moped that I ride for under 1km per travel. So, I think that any issues concerning the environment should start from the societal level and then individual, not the other way around. As we have two small children and a dog, it is sometimes not convenient to walk or use the bicycle. In those cases, we need to use the car, but it is not often as we try to do things with the kids in the neighbourhood. There is a place for the kids to play just outside our building for example. Perhaps, what I can see as a potential problem is the rising fuel prices which affect everyone and not just me and my

family. I have a normal paying job. We are a middle-class family and earn as much as any other middle-class families in our neighbourhood, so I do not think that the high fuel prices will affect us more negatively than they do any other people. As I said, we do not use the car that often so I am not that worried about the cost of petrol more than the next person. You should also keep in mind that society has changed. People have gotten more comfortable with using the car nowadays, everyone needs it and it is more convenient to use.

Quotes

As an individual person, I cannot do much harm to the environment with my little use of the moped that I use to travel less than 1km.

People have gotten comfortable with using the car. Society has changed and it's getting more common to use the car for everyday activities.

Keywords

Car/moped short distance, walking proximity, middle-class, the most harm to the environment comes from the societal level

RL7_SE06, Sweden, Boel: it was 34 years I went by bus the last time

Narrative

My name is Boel, I am 66 years old, I live in a neighbourhood located in the outskirts of a middle-sized city in Sweden. My partner has passed away, and my dog too. I have a daughter who lives in the city centre. I have lived here for 19 years. I was out with the dog a lot, even during night when needed. You never knew what could happen, there could be someone with a knife or someone needing cigarettes. I had my dog, so she reacted if... I did not feel unsafe, you need to be able to go out still. When I had the dog, I used to walk more than 10 000 steps a day. 8-9 walks a day, it was nice. We took walks in the forest.

I have a few friends around, but not many now when my dog is not with us, it's not the same – not the same walking routes anymore. But I walk in the forest every day during daytime, not during evenings. I was walking on the bike path and there was a group of these, you are not allowed to say this, but you know [young men with immigrant

background] walking towards me, and I did not move out of the way. I used the right side, and they didn't. I know some very nice people with immigrant background too. You should not judge anyone.

I usually take the bike; I can get a ride with my friend who has a car. At work I had to use a car, I worked as a cleaner and had lots of customers all over town. I had to have a car; I drove 500 km a month. It was stressful, I even had to eat in the car. I took the bus to visit my daughter recently, for the first time in 34 years. I did not know how to do it, but my daughter explained to me that I do this and that. It was simple! I have used the bus two times, the first time I did not know where to get off. I asked the driver, and he helped me. The second time was much easier, I knew where to get off.

My car was damaged, first they burned down the garage, but the car only got sooty, and after that the landlord paid for a parking lot here. Then I went to pick up my daughter and, on the way back I got held up in the roundabout. I was out of petrol even though I was supposed to have plenty left. Turned out they had drilled a hole in the gas tank. I took the car to the garage, but then they called and said they had a burglary and they had taken the catalytic converter from the car. I got so tired that I scrapped the car. At first, I missed it, but now I think that I don't have to pay for the garage and don't have to pay insurance, it's SEK 1000 a month. I can use that money for other things. I use my bike to get groceries, it's 7 minutes to the grocery store, that's nothing. And I get exercise. If I need to wholesale, I get help from my friend who has a car. It's cheaper to do wholesale. Depending on how tired I am, I walk to the grocery store or to the neighbourhood centre. I can't walk to the city centre, it's too far. I can't do such a long distance; I have paralysis in my leg, so I pedal with one leg.

I am glad I can cycle around here. If it's too far, then I stop and rest. I remember when I got rid of the car, how much I missed it, but you learn. I did not have a bike then either, so I walked. But it was not easy since I had a dog, she did not allow me to leave the house. She was howling, and I was concerned the neighbours would report me. I felt it was nice to walk, but I was concerned about my dog, so I was in a hurry. I am not worried now; I only think about what to show. I take the bike to not have to carry things, I walk in the forest because it gives me energy.

The bus is 26 SEK (almost 3 euros) and it's rather expensive, for one hour. What do you do in an hour up town? You only have time to get off and walk a bit and then back again. If I had the car, how much is the parking? How much does it cost to go by car? For gas? It's also expensive to go by car. When I went by bus 34 years ago, it was 8 SEK. I bought bus cards, and it was cheaper than going by car.

During the pandemic, I wasn't out much. I was out with the dog, but could not meet anyone, my partner was ill and was at home so I could not bring anyone here, did not want to risk him getting covid. I was ok, did not catch anything, not even from the day care I was working at the time.

Around here not all women can cycle. Well, Swedish women can, but my neighbour can't. It's mostly men that cycles. One neighbour she tried to learn, but she fell and hurt her knees, and she did not want to cycle after that. I learned to cycle on a cycle for grown-ups, a bike without a chain.

Quotes



I can't do such a long distance; I have paralysis in my leg, so I pedal with one leg.

I was nervous to go by bus, but now I've gone twice, and soon three times.

It's like my daughter said the other day, where have all the swedes gone?

I remember when I got rid of the car, how much I missed it, but you learn.

Keywords

Walking, dog walking, safety, bus mobility, bus as expensive, re-learning mobility, cycling, cycling with disability, socially disadvantaged area

RL7_SE07, Sweden, Yamina: The high costs of using the bus threaten my will to more freely

Narrative

My name is Yamina, I am a 49-year-old woman from Morocco. I have lived in Sweden since 1999. I am a mother of four, and I live in a neighbourhood in the outskirts of a middle-sized Swedish city with my family. My two oldest children are pursuing an education from the university as high school teachers, I have a son who will complete high school next year, and my youngest daughter also goes to school. Because I work in this neighbourhood, I do not often use the bus, I walk. But I cannot walk everywhere I go and sometimes I need to use the bus to go grocery shopping at [name of store], for example, which is cheaper than the ones we have nearby, or I just want to go into town. I also use the bus if I want to go to a shopping mall for shopping and sometimes my son drives me there. But now, I have asked my son to stop driving the car as it costs too much to use both the car and the bus, we simply cannot afford it with my small pay. All of my children use the bus every day to go to school, and I am the one who pays for all four of their monthly bus tickets, and it is not cheap for me even though I have a job. Although my oldest children have CSN (student loan/support), I pay for their bus tickets because I think that the money that they get is not enough, so I have to help them. Generally, I think that it has become more expensive to use the bus, in fact I think everything is getting more expensive, petrol, parking, food, taxes, everything. This is a problem. For example, it costs 52 SEK to go to and from the city centre. It is even cheaper to use a taxi when

travelling with my family, we occupy four seats, and it costs us almost as much as it would have taking the bus.

Of course, I could choose to save the 52 SEK and go grocery shopping nearby, but I think that that takes away my freedom. Freedom to go where I want and do what I want. I do not want to feel like I am bound to this area and cannot go outside because it has gotten too expensive to use the bus. I want to be free to meet and see other people, go out for dinner with the other women in the neighbourhood like we usually do, but everything is so expensive. I do not understand why it has gotten so expensive to use the bus if they run on electricity and not on petrol. In my opinion, it should be less expensive to use the bus since they run on electricity. And in our community, many mothers need to use the bus, bicycles are not an option for them because they cannot ride them, they never had access to them in their home countries. So, the high costs of everything that does not correspond to their low income makes life more difficult for them. Also, it does not always work well with the bus, it is sometimes overcrowded and in certain situations, I choose to wait for the next bus so as to allow those travelling with children to come home earlier. Another problem that I see with using the bus is that there is a risk of getting fined for not having a valid ticket. For example, I had to pay 1000kr in fine for my son who had not managed to pay for the ticket on time via the app. I know from my own experience that the app does not always work, sometimes it is too cold outside and the mobile phone stops working or you run out of battery. There is no option to pay on the bus, especially during COVID, so how should I pay for the bus if my phone dies? It is not only me who has had to pay this fine, I know of our mothers in the community who also had to pay for the fines because of different reasons. And if you already cannot afford to pay for a bus ticket that costs 26kr, how are you expected to pay for a 1000kr fine?

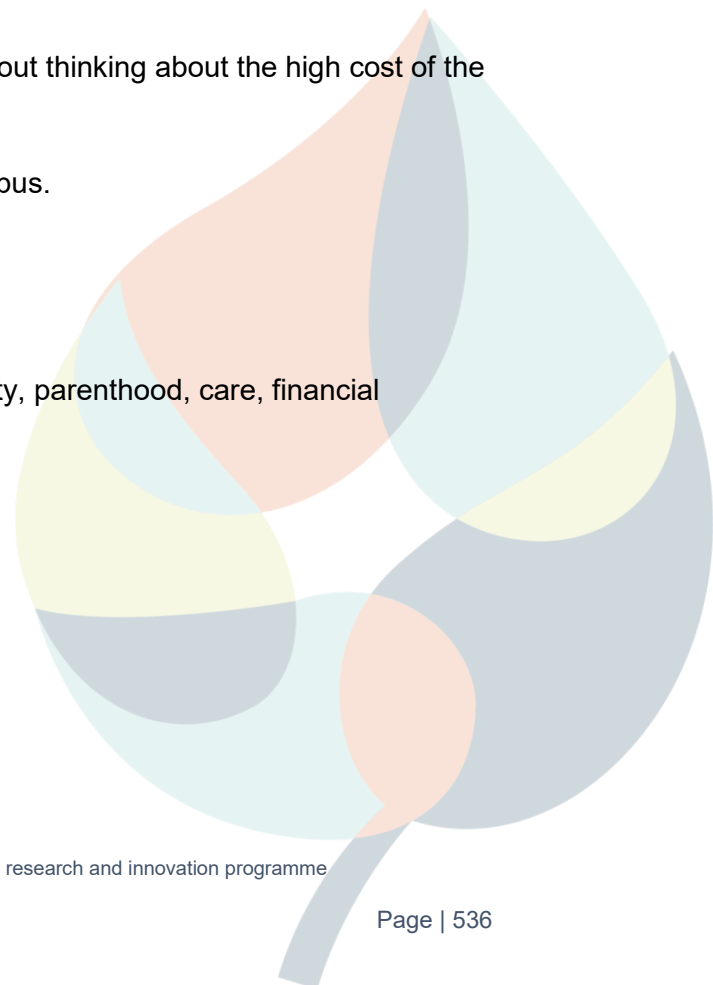
Quotes

I want to be free to go outside of [name of area] without thinking about the high cost of the bus.

I think that it has become very expensive to use the bus.

Keywords

Travel expenses, cycling, immigrant women's mobility, parenthood, care, financial responsibility, free public transport



RL7_SE08, Sweden, Hussein: I prefer to walk over using the car or bus

Narrative

My name is Hussein, I am a 34-year-old man from Somalia and I live in a neighbourhood in the outskirts of a middle-sized Swedish city with my wife and two young children. At the moment, I have a full-time job here in this neighbourhood. I think this area is the best place a person can live because you never feel alone, everybody knows each other. I normally walk to work. Every morning, I walk my son to kindergarten before coming to work, it takes about 20 minutes. Although it takes us about 20 minutes to walk, I do not think it is long. My family and I have a car, but we do not use it often. My wife is an interpreter and can be called in to work at any time. She needs to use the car as it is faster and convenient for her to get to her appointments. We also use the car and sometimes even a taxi, for example, when we need to do a huge grocery shopping in town or go to a shopping mall or outlet to buy the children some clothes it is much quicker than using the bus. I also think that it is cheaper to use a taxi sometimes, it costs about 70 SEK when you order it through the app. There are grocery stores nearby, but they are not price friendly. We, therefore, choose to go shopping elsewhere and to get there you need to use the car or bus. It would, of course, be easier, quicker and cheaper for us if we had the possibility to go shopping nearby. I mean, it can take several hours just to go shopping because of how far it is from where we live, but we have to go there because of better prices. We also use the car when the children have an appointment with the doctor as the health centre is located outside our area, it's closer to the city centre. But sometimes we use the bus to go to the doctors. I also often use the bus if I want to go into the city centre by myself because it is cheaper and easier to use the bus. I do not need to think about parking, which is often difficult to find and a bit expensive, besides I do not like cars myself. However, when I am with my family, we do not usually take the bus because there is not always space on the bus for the baby stroller. There are many families with children who live in the area, so sometimes the bus is full, which can mean that we have to wait for the next bus, that I think is a problem.

I also feel unsafe on the bus, especially after lunch because of the overcrowding, school children return from school for example. And when the bus is full, it can just go past you and sometimes it stops but just to let passengers off. It is times like this that could make you feel like if I had a car, I would not have to be in such situations. Another problem that I see with using the bus is that the bus tickets are only valid for 1 hour and sometimes you do not manage to do everything that you need to do. I have participated in a meeting on how to address problems with public transport and from that I see that there will always be issues that we cannot always solve.

Quotes

It is cheaper and easier to use the bus.

Using the car is much faster.

It is difficult to find parking in town and it is a bit expensive.

Keywords

Public transport pricing, public transport overcrowded, car, parking, time restrictions, walking locally, car convenient, bus experienced as unsafe

RL7_SE09, Sweden, Amalia: We rely on the bus, but it is getting too expensive

Narrative

My name is Amalia, I am a married 59-year-old woman with 3 adult children. Since I moved to Sweden from Morocco 32 years ago, my family and I have lived in this area located in the outskirts of a middle-sized Swedish city. This is also where I work full-time and have been working for the last 16 years. I like living and working here, it is a nice family area. I work a lot with children and teenagers who live the area, but I am also actively involved in different associations that work to empower immigrant women in our community. These women have asked me to be their voice, so my reflections are based on my own personal experiences as well as on what they have told me about their own experiences. My family, and I also know of a lot of other families in the area, rely on the bus for everyday use, but I walk to work every day since it is close to where we live. My daughter, for example, studies at the university and uses the bus to go there every day. My son also uses the bus every day to go to work. He works in a nearby city and therefore must first take the bus into the city centre and then change busses. My son used to use the car to go to work but because of how expensive it is with petrol and parking; he now only uses the bus. As it is now increasingly expensive to use the car, my husband and I only use the car if we are going to travel far, for example, but if we are travelling within the city we live in we choose to use the bus, it is easier, we do not have to think about parking and so. So, in total we have to buy 5 monthly bus cards for the family, it costs almost 3 thousand kronor every month, that is very expensive even for me who has a job. It is even more expensive to buy a single ticket. It costs about 26 SEK to go into town and the ticket is only valid for about an hour, this is not enough if you have errands to do in town, in the end you end up spending 52 SEK just to go to and from town, that is a problem. Other women in the community, who are unemployed, also complain of the highly priced bus tickets. These women have about five to six children, who they have to buy bus cards for

to go to school, even though they cannot afford it as everything has gotten so expensive. The municipality does not offer any help to the families in neighbourhood even though it is because of them that most children living in the area now have to travel by bus every day just to get to school. Due to the increasing cost of living, most people cannot afford to buy bus tickets for themselves and their children. They instead prioritise other expenses such as rent and food. This means that they sometimes use the bus without paying for it and end up being fined about 1000kr, sometimes even two to three times on the same day. Sometimes schoolchildren lose their bus cards on their way home and end up being fined as well, making it even more expensive for the families. Although most families rely on the bus, I have heard from the children I work with, especially girls, that they feel unsafe on the bus, more so in the evenings. They have told me that there are sometimes men on the bus who seem to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs and tend to behave badly. This is a problem because it causes the children and other adults on the bus to feel unsafe. The young girls have also reported that some older men on the bus look at them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. The municipality should do something about our safety on the bus and the safety of the bus drivers who sometimes fall victim of the bad behaviours by these men.

Another problem with using the bus is that it gets too crowded, especially in the mornings when schoolchildren are going to school, it is chaotic. Sometimes the bus is already full at the first stop and goes past other people who are waiting at other stops, this makes people angry, but what can the bus driver do if the bus is already full. The crowding on the bus was also problematic during the Covid period. Although the municipality had measures in place to ensure the safety of the passengers on the bus, we entered in the back of the bus and we were told to maintain a distance of 1,5m in the bus, but this did not work out too well. There were many times when people were standing close to each other, we did not have a choice, everyone wanted to get to work or school on time so they chose to take the bus even though it was full. As I mentioned before, I work a lot with young people in the community. We rely on the bus to carry out activities in town, but this is proving to be more and more difficult. One reason is because of the expensive bus tickets, another reason is because the municipality does no longer allow us to travel with a large group of children on the bus at the same time. We have access to a minibus that we can use, but it cannot accommodate all the children at once which means that we would need to make about 8 trips just to go into town. This is not economically nor environmentally friendly.

Quotes

The bus has become more expensive. It used to be cheaper, I could buy one ticket to use to and from town but now I cannot. Today, to go into town it costs about 26 SEK, the ticket is only valid for 1 hour. I am forced to buy another ticket to go back home which means I end up spending 52 SEK just to go into town. This is a problem for many families.

It is very expensive to use the car because of the high costs of petrol.

Keywords



Travel costs, bus dependency, bus safety, petrol costs, community spokes person

RL7_SE10, Sweden, Meheret: I've shown people that I am a good parent despite the wheelchair

Narrative

My name is Meheret, I am 55 years old, I live in an outskirt area of a middle-sized Swedish city. I am disabled and need an electric wheelchair to get around, I can walk short distances using crutches. I have two children and a husband. We have lived here since 2014, before we lived on the other side of town. As a Christian, I felt exposed in that area. Also, my husband was bullied, and I was bullied too, but I ignored them. It's not funny. It was young people mainly, they vandalised the church and shops, stole things. The families had problems; the police were there every now and then. We lived there for a long time, it wasn't good, it wasn't good at all.

Before, I used the car much more than today, now I can take my electrical wheelchair to work. This is much better for the environment, feels much better, is much faster from door to door. And I can help others in the area to bring groceries home from the store. But sometimes it is not safe. The other day I was going home from an activity, and it was very dark, I met a guy, and it did not feel good at all. But I still use the e-wheelchair, even though it feels unsafe sometimes. Two years ago, there was one time when I went shopping, and left the bag at the entrance home. I was going to park in the garage, and then I saw a guy at the entrance next to us, he was wearing a helmet and I was cheering but he shook his head. After four steps he came from behind and then he pulled off my necklace, then I ended up on the ground and this was 10pm, in the evening so I screamed and said I'm calling the police. He had a motorcycle, so he took it and drove off very fast.

I got my commitment to environmental issues from a Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) course, we talked about this then- and it stuck with me. But it is mainly me in the family that is committed. I tell my children and ask what kind of future they want for their children. But they use the car all the time, my daughter that is, my son is 18 now and about to take his driver's license. Their friends have access to cars, to nice cars, mine is crappy. My son, we talked about his daily transport when he started the gymnasium and we asked how you will get there. Will you take the bus, or should we get you a bicycle? We had got him a bike when we moved here, but it got stolen after a month. Since then, they did not dare to buy a new one. Should we get you a scooter so you can go to school without having to change buses? No, he said, I can walk. If he had a bike he would earn a lot of

time, but he refuses. A scooter he says, where shall I park it in school, it will be stolen. And that is right, it is not easy.

When we moved here, my son ended up in the wrong company. I had thought that everything was ok now that we moved here, that I had control over the situation, but he ended up with the wrong crowd. I was after him, it was lucky that I had the electric wheelchair, with the wheelchair I could walk right up to where they were with his friends. I was after him all the time, at the recreation centre, at the school, where he was. It's turned around now; everyone says I have succeeded. I feel like I've shown people, both Swedes and immigrants, that I am a good parent despite the wheelchair. Swedes are used to seeing people in wheelchairs having children and understand that you can take care of children even if you're in a wheelchair. If it had been another woman with no disability, don't think she would have been able to do as I did. It was minus 20 degrees outside, and I took my wheelchair to go look for him, that no one else would do. I did that, and I am grateful. I had to fight 2 years before he decided to leave his gang. Otherwise, they get killed. It has to do with whether the parents have the time and know the language. I thought I had an eye on my kids, but I didn't. Can parents limit kids to where they are and what they do when they're out? Do they have time? They have a lot of children, don't know Swedish maybe. If it's the man who speaks Swedish, how much time does he have to spend on the children? The woman, she may know Swedish, but is it not easy to take care of so many children in the family.

Quotes

I tell my children, I don't want you to have a world without water, without greenery so you have to think about whether you want it that way for your children? They're quiet, well, maybe, maybe not, they don't say much. They almost laugh at me, grinning.

I have shown immigrants that I can take care of children, and I can look after them just as well as others. Maybe better.

There won't be a fight, but I feel guilty if I leave my car to my daughter and she's about to drive back and forth back and forth without thinking. I feel guilty.

Keywords

Motherhood and disability, socially vulnerable neighbourhood, religion, Swedish for Immigrants, e-mobility, unsafe neighbourhoods, criminality, youth crime

RL7_BE01, Belgium, Alea's Struggle to Integrate and Mix of Private-Public Transport

Narrative

I am a 22-year-old Syrian woman, living in Belgium for 2 years and 9 months. I came from Syria by myself. In Belgium, I first stayed at immigration centres, then came to live in social housing with women (we shared utilities, but I had my own room). I later looked for housing, not so easy. On Facebook I could find a place, but I didn't even have 300 euros (only 50 euros per week). I lived with a friend, but it became too problematic. Now all is OK, but it took a while. I now have my welfare support and my papers. I think Belgium is OK. It's a safe country. The people are friendly.

I like to work ; I am very active. I have worked since I was 14. In Belgium, I studied and worked jobs at social welfare. I now have a job in recycled food distribution. Later, administration, or I love children – would like to take care of them or the elderly. I am good at that. If anybody needs help, I will be there. I have energy – staying at home drives me crazy; I just think and cry. My days looks like this: During the week, I work. That is 15 minutes from my house by bus. After work, I follow my Dutch language course. On Saturdays, I study for my driver's license. I am going to save for a small car. Where I live, I find it very necessary to have a car. It's also easy. Next week I'll have my last lesson. I practice with a tutor, 20 hours more and I can drive alone. I studied so hard for the theoretic exam. I failed four times, got it the fifth – I cried with happiness.

In the weekend, I also like to go to the swimming pool, to go there I will take my bike. Before I started my license, I did everything by bike; groceries, to visit my friends, but not to work. Yes, I like to go by bike. But when I am tired, I don't: 15-20 minutes is the maximum.

Sustainability is a difficult topic for me to understand. But I use public transport. I am happy with the train, it's simple. The bus is not my favourite; sometimes too late, or I want to work late. My biggest problem with the bus, I had several times that it did not stop when I asked for it. I said, 'please, stop, I need to get out for work!' Also, other people asked the driver to stop, but no, he drove on to the next town. Had to return on another bus, came way too late at work. When I go to the supermarket by bus, drivers are sometimes not nice, pulling away just when I come with my groceries. Well, many are friendly, but many are not, too. Once on the train, I forgot my discount card, and then I had forgotten it, it was in my other bag. I had to pay 35 euros, already paid 11. It almost cost me 50 in total. I always have these miseries.

My (lack of native) language is a problem. I always need to ask – can you explain. When I arrived, I had to rely on my Arabic friends to translate everything. That's why I learn Flemish as good as I can. Difficult language. Even today (I understand a lot now) the dialect here is much more difficult than the official language I learn at school. I have to ask often; can you please repeat it? I live in a small regional town, which I like. I have the bus and tram to a bigger nearby town, where I can take a train to Brussels or Antwerp. I do that. Antwerp takes me 2h40. By car it would be 1H40. In the future, I want to drive myself. I will save for the car, not big or expensive, 2000 or 3000 euros on Facebook. I

have a year. My income is 1700. My house is 550. 80 for phone and internet. I know the car is expensive, but I will use it here. I imagine I can park the car at the station to take the train. I will not drive to Antwerp or Brussels.

Quotes

Sustainability is a difficult topic for me to understand.

I am happy with the train, it's simple.

In the future, I want to drive myself. I will save for a car.

I always have these miseries (using public transport). My (lack of native) language is a problem. I always need to ask – can you explain.

Keywords

Language barrier, issues using public transport, independence and access, saving for a car

RL7_BE02, Belgium, Paulina's Disability and Reliance on Public Transport & Individuals

Narrative

I am Paulina, 23 years old, I live with my parents in a village and I have a cerebral visual disability. On top of that I have lost part of my eyesight - the lower part is lost. This means I cannot drive a car or bicycle and have to rely on public transport or my parents to go where I want to go. I have lived in Belgium for 10 years now but am originally from Poland which makes it difficult for me to speak Flemish.

Relying on public transport during middle school was relatively easy since I could take the school bus that stops and leaves in my village and would bring me to school and back. There are not a lot of busses that pass through my village because it is a small village. The schoolbus is the bus of De Lijn (public transport company) that goes between two larger towns but it does not always pass through my village - only at 8.00 AM and at 9.10 AM on schooldays. At other times/days it stops at the nearby national road so other than on school hours it has not been easy. During Autumn, Christmas and Summer

holidays there fewer busses so it is difficult to go to bigger cities. At those moments I had to try and reach de Belbus (on demand public bus service) but that was also not easy. For the Belbus stop you need to walk 2KM and for me that means a 1 hour walk minimum to get to the stop. So my mobility is sometimes difficult because of timing issues. After middle/high school I studied at college in Kortrijk and it was easier for me since I could reach campus by foot and there are way more busses available in the big city. I graduated as logistical assistant and also have a degree in caregiving and in education. I now work 3 days a week (in a supported working system) in the nearby larger town but my working hours are adapted to allow me to take public transport. Starting at 8 AM is impossible with the bus schedule so I can only start at 9.30 even though with a car it would only be a few minutes drive. From my village, I take a bus to a larger village and from there a bus to the town. To go back sometimes I can take the train from the town to the larger village and then again the bus to my village. It's not simple to plan I cannot do this with the Belbus because they do not have this routing.

Even though my work situation is adapted to support my disability this only goes for 3 days a week. I also had a chance to work in a third village for 2 more days a week but there is no public transport that could get me there and back. Other than for work I do not make a lot of trips since I have to ask my mom and count on my parents to bring and fetch me. Sometimes the Belbus would work but not often so... too bad. So other than work I mostly stay at home. I don't plan too much. The 2 days that I don't work I am at home and also in the weekends unless I plan to meet friends (e.g. to go to Ghent) but then I have to plan in advance. So I don't have many hobbies. Hanging around and diamond painting, reading and sometimes riding the bike. I wanted to start indoor climbing but the only indoor wall was in the next town so I never even started. Watching TV is a bit difficult for me but yes, sometimes I do. Riding the bike is dangerous for me (according to my doctor) so I only bike on small roads where there is not much traffic. Big roads are not safe and I also do not ride in the dark. I have tried the RoP (a mobility service for people with disabilities) but they charge 25 euros for a ride So that is too expensive. For a return trip this means 50 euros!

Quotes

I am quite nervous for this interview. XXX has driven me here and she will bring me back. So I need to let her know when we are finished.

It's always looking for the correct hours on the timetables - often I am way to early on the first stop and have to wait for the next bus.

I wanted to do indoor climbing but the only indoor climbing wall is in Ieper so it's impossible for me to get there. I didn't even started it.

Keywords

Visual disability, public transport, limited mobility

RL7_BE03, Belgium, Aaden's is integrating his family and moving 7 children around

Narrative

I am Aaden, from Somalia. I am 30 years old. I arrived in Belgium when I was 26. I stayed in Brussels. Today, I have my wife and seven children with me. Yes, seven. They are between 6 and 13 years old. We live in a remote, smaller town at the Belgian coast, near France.

In '17 spent 6 months at a refugee centre in Brussels. I ended up in this western region of Belgium, like many other refugees. There are many refugees and centres here. But it is not easy to get there.

I am making my live. I receive support, I have a social assistant. I already had several jobs. I worked at the local amusement park. I had to take the tram to get there, that was easy.

Today, I have a logistic job in social welfare. Food distribution. Before, I biked 14 kilometre to work, it was sometimes hard. But to take my family anywhere, we are nine, was not possible. We would go by bus or bike. Yes, the family has bikes. The children go to school by bike. I saw only one solution, I finally got my license and since three months I have a car. It was very hard to get the licence. Especially the exam. I finally can go where I want.

I do not go everywhere by car, gas is expensive. Going to Brussels is easy. I take the train. 18 euro. I would not take the car.

Quotes

Before, I biked 14 kilometres to work, it was sometimes hard".

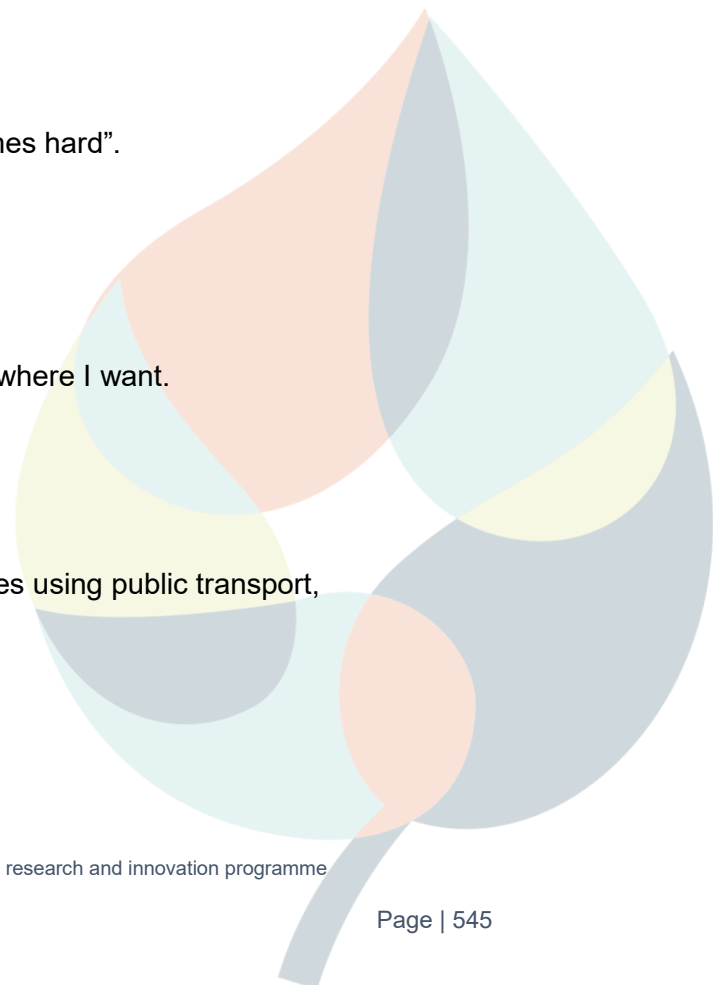
I had to take the tram to get there, that was easy.

The (7) children go to school by bike.

Since three months I have a car (...) I finally can go where I want.

Keywords

Very large family, language barrier, car access, issues using public transport, independence found in owning a car



RL7_BE04, Belgium, Andrea's increasing isolation in rural Flanders

Narrative

I am 60 years old, I am living alone in a house I acquired 33 years ago. I then found myself a husband to renovate it ;-). We raised two kids, they moved out, so did my husband.

When we had children, it was ideal. There were other kids, same age as mine. With other families, we managed to make our street a 'low traffic' street. Today, it all has changed. Now it's the perfect place to get isolated. Even if we are only 6 km from the nearest town. But there are only 30 houses here. Not that the people here are not nice, but here, everybody has a car. I know which car belongs to which house. But I would not recognise the people themselves.

I am the only person without car. I want to live between people. Where I can walk, have a chat with others, do groceries.

I thought, as long as I live here, I need a car. No other way. But, then my car broke down. I had not the money to fix it, let alone for an electric car. Do not feel like buying a petrol car anymore. But more rational; I figured that I should not buy a car, having it standing in front of the house all week, for just visiting a friend in the weekend. Or to have it standing at the station all week. It's just not rational, defendable, it would be a dumb decision. So, my mobility challenges: to start, what I do now, would not have been possible with kids. At all. My class in Kortrijk starts at 9. To get there, I leave at 7:10 by bike to the nearby town. From there, I take the train to Kortrijk. There, I have another bike to take me to class. Almost two hours. By car, 23 minutes. To go back, class stops at 12:00, but my first train is at 13:10. I am home around 14:10 (if all goes as planned). So: 7 hours from home, to follow 3 hours of class.

I explain it to myself like this: at least I got 20 km's of exercise by bike. That's all nice when the weather is fine.

And, not everybody can do it, certainly not having kids. Or being even 65 with some health issues.

Once in Kortrijk, I can go anywhere in the country. Still, getting back is always a problem – everywhere I go, I need to leave early to get back home – public transport stops, I would not get back to my house.

The bus, its drives so infrequently, and service ends early evening. Imagine, the library in Ieper, only 6 km's from here. The library organises language evenings. I cannot go, as the last bus is at 20:00. Of course, I can take the bike. But others, as those in the refugee centre nearby – those that would really benefit from this course - cannot go anywhere, as the last bus service ends that soon.

So, even a refugee centre with 350 people, open since years, with people that have no other means of transportation, is not served by any decent connection. These people have nowhere to go. I think that is so small minded! I am a social worker. From my background, I often experienced how access to / lack of public transport hinders development or isolates people. We are so old fashioned. We cannot solve problems. I do

not get that, in 2022, with all the environmental problems, we do not invest more in public transport. I was in Copenhagen, it was fantastic – bikes being taken even on busses.

Who are the decisionmakers. Who takes these decisions? It cannot be De Lijn (PT operator), they should serve the community. Local government? I thought there was a policy level appointed to take care of these issues mobility issues (vervoerregio's).

I do not use the bus, hardly. This summer I did go to a nearby city. 23 km's by bike. Did that daily when working. Luckily, a bus stop near my house. I took it last week. It was not that long to get there either. So I am lucky. But in a large village nearby, I was surprised to see fewer connections, and none on Sunday! Public transport, should be universal and accessible. Its not the case here. I see other mothers struggle. Asking an exception for myself - I hate that. But I do ask help. I see so many foreigners that need to bot receive help.

Not knowing people I this hamlet, I have no support. the community is too small to have any support to ride-share or car pool. A proper ride sharing car, can only be found in leper – but there I do have other options to get around.

No electric bike. For 7 km's to the nearby town, I do not need one. It's a hype. I had a speed-pedelec rented for two weeks, for a job. But where would I leave it? I have three bikes plus a bike pass for rental bikes in Kortrijk, that should suffice. I am a minimalist. Yet, some others see me as a loser because I take the train. Today, I feel I am even more an exception than before. Yet, we all need to cut back on our emissions. I never thought it was possible, to live without car here, but I can manage without a car. I will eventually move, though.

Quotes

Some really see me as a loser because I take the train. Today, I feel I am even more an exception than before.

Everywhere I go, I need to leave early to get back home – public transport stops.

I know which car belongs to which house. But I would not recognise the people themselves.

Today (...) this village its the perfect place to get isolated.

Keywords

Isolation, vicious circle (poverty trap, though limited), sustainable lifestyle, ditched the car, desire to move to the city, struggle to find and reach work and friends

RL7_BE05, Belgium, Frederic lost his car lifestyle after bankruptcy and environmental restrictions

Narrative

My name is Frederic, I just turned 75, living in a big Belgian city for the better part of my life. That said, I was raised in a small town. Did everything by bike when I was young – lived there until my thirties. Going into adulthood, I fell in love with Alfa Romeo, cars became my hobby. Started working in the city - took me 20 mins to get there, even when the roads were bad. Today, roads are perfect, but it will take me 45-60 mins - roads ways are too full now. Years 1965 – 1975 I owned Aston Martins, Porsches. I used to drive fast, 140-160, the engine was just right at that speed. You can hear that, also the gear change. Now I stay within the limits. I am older, more careful for the others – it's also busier. The differences between car speeds are too much, dangerous. Had an interesting career as photographer. My fortune however changed at 60. Got ripped off, had an accident, suffered bankruptcy. We now live in a small apartment. Since 5 years, I am restricted even more - the environmental constraints of living in a LEZ (low emission zone). Already 5 years a LEZ victim.

I love my car. Top class Alfa, that is not improvable. Absolutely no issue to the environment. That V6 Ferrari engine, is still being produced today. Out of protest, I buy no new car. Why to throw my money on a small car, that is not safe.

If I need to go far, if the weather forecast allows I take the bike, and drive 20 mins to the out of town parking to fetch my car. For my trips I do not consider the environment. Or the environment does weigh say 5% in my decisions. I do not believe my car is that dirty. Same engine is still in newer cars. But I am the one who can't use it. But if possible, I bike, 6-7 km's. In the city, the best choice, for convenience and speed. All my displacements and groceries are done by bike. Don't want electric bike - for health; this is my exercise. I bike a lot, I need the exercise for my arthritis. Walking the dog, is more challenging for me.

If it rains, I likely postpone my bike trip. Or I take a tram when it rains. Or if I take the dog along. Or if I need to carry stuff. I even take a taxi to get to my car - at nights, when I pick up somebody from the airport.

Don't like the bus. Tram is more accessible, convenient to get on board. What I saw in Vienna, public transport was much better organised. Even in Turkey, small minicabs, no waiting. You just pass your money down the crowd on to the driver. I look at the tram, why are they so long? They are half empty, or totally empty. I want three short once, instead. Short times are key. Public transport should be on time, half of the time, it does not come at all. At all! Or it stays in traffic or a red light for hours. This is not possible.

Safety for bikes is not enough. But I feel safe, I am not scared of cars. But, the lack of road code knowledge from cycles... going two ways, everywhere. And the steps, mopeds, they are a disaster. Police is not enforcing anything. You can't change this.

I would leave town, to regain freedom and my car. It's my wife's choice to live in the city - can't leave my wife. She uses a taxi to go to the doctor. No public transport, never. She thinks it's dirty. She does bike, but only say for 600 meters.

Still, my future is electric, though. An electric wheelchair or three-wheeled motorised scooter...

Quotes

...the environment does weigh say 5% in my decisions” “pointless environmental restrictions” “already 5 years a LEZ victim.

The bike (...) in the city, is the best choice for convenience and speed.

Don't want electric bike - for health; this is my exercise.

Keywords

Car aficionado, car use vs environmental restrictions, lack of funding (bankruptcy), cyclist out of necessity

RL7_BE06, Belgium, Lisa's Struggles to Get to Work and to Find Alternative Means of Transport

Narrative

My name is Lisa and I am a 32-year-old woman living in a small village. I am a single mother and I have four children aged 4, 5, 6 and 10 years old. I work in an elementary school in the nearby small city, which is about 10 kilometres away. I used to be able to rely on my now ex-partner for transport to work, as he had his own car. I initially worked as a cleaning help at various people's homes, with him driving me around to all of the different addresses. After we split up, I didn't have any form of transport anymore and now I still only have very limited options for getting to my work at the school every weekday. The normal bus service only comes to my village four times a day at inopportune times, so every day I have to call the Belbus to go to work and to come back home. The Belbus is a bus service that you call beforehand and then they come to pick you up at a time that's more or less agreeable to you. In the shop, I can buy a card for 10 rides on the Belbus

which costs €16, but that isn't compensated by my work. Another way that I managed to get to work a few times is by making use of Nestor's services, which is an organisation that helps the elderly who still want to work by getting them jobs. They occasionally drive me back and forth on a voluntary basis. I also have two friends who can drive me in case of urgent needs or emergencies, but other than that I don't have any options for getting around. The distance between my village and the city where I work is too big to use a bicycle. I also make use of the Belbus to go on little trips with the kids during the weekends. I heard about the Belbus through an organisation called Familiehulp ('Family Help') that was aiding me. I first came into contact with them through seeing a bus stop advertisement around the time that my ex-partner and I split up. I initially wanted to quit my cleaning job because I had no way left of getting to people's homes in time, but the lady at Familiehulp informed me about the concept of the Belbus. I'm not exactly satisfied with the Belbus, but I'm working on getting my own driver's license to make transport easier. Right now, I'm studying for my theoretical exam and I am nervous about getting a passing grade. I'm hoping to be able to afford my own car too, but I don't know anything about cars. What for me matters the most is how much it would cost: the cheaper, the better. Given that I have four children, I'd need a car that accommodates six people as well. So I'm not sure how that would work for more environmentally-friendly or electric cars. I could get a loan for an electric car, why not? Right now, I go to the neighbourhood shop by foot or by bike, so I don't use any polluting transport to get my groceries. I mostly walk there, which takes fifteen minutes, but if it's only for one or two small items (like bread, for example) I go by bike. I also do the same sometimes when picking up the kids from school, which is manageable as it is located in the village itself and is not the school that I work at. The neighbourhood shop unfortunately does not provide all of the products I'd want from a regular supermarket, but since I am in this situation I have to endure it. In the beginning, it was also difficult to get a doctor to pay a house visit as the nearest one was not that close, but recently they did open a practice nearby. I will be moving to the city where I work in a few months, so my options for stores and other services will luckily expand. I'd probably stick to walking around and not cycle around as much, because it's busier in the city than I'm used to and cyclists often have to ride on the road next to the cars, which is kind of dangerous. That's the biggest reason I would not want my kids to cycle around, even though they have bikes. Right now, my oldest son goes to school by bike because it's only five minutes away, but that wouldn't be safe in the city. Car drivers have to be more conscious of cyclists by driving slower and there should probably be more biking lanes. I would still have to drive a lot myself if I get a car, as my children will keep going to school in the small village even after we move to the city, for the time being.

Quotes

My ex-partner had to drive me from house to house when I still cleaned houses.

I am studying to get a driver's license right now. (...) I think that the most important thing when buying a car, like for everyone, is how much it costs."

Keywords



Special bus service, no car, single mother, small village, bike infrastructure

RL7_BE07, Belgium, The challenges of a single mother with three children

Narrative

I am Cindy, 39, a single mother with three children, one of which is in primary school, the two others in secondary. My career has been in human resources, and when my employer started to fire most of my colleagues and team, I decided to quit the job. My former manager and I decided to start a business. We are fully operational since 1 October 2022.

My second oldest is going to school in a boarding school. This school is in Flanders for her to learn to speak Dutch, some 80 km from home. In the weekends, I have an arrangement with 3 other parents and we each go one week out of four to pick-up and bring our children. My oldest son and youngest daughter go to school in our village some 2,5 km from home. My son always bikes even with bad weather. My youngest bikes only when the weather permits.

I bought a second-hand car when I had to hand over back my company car. All our family trips are done by car. I will use the bike inside the village, including for shopping.

We have a bus stop nearby but never use the bus. We could use it to go to the nearby city, but never do. I made the choice that the children would go by bike to school as much as possible; I am lucky there are schools not too far and that the way going is going down. So the children arrive on time. When coming back, they have to bike uphill.

Many parents do not understand this choice and consider I take risks. On the way to school they have to cross a very busy national road. There is a traffic light and I have learned them to always get off their bike and cross walking. They are also well equipped (helmet, fluorescent jacket, lights; ...). I have biked intensively with the children over summer to train them, also on the road to school, showing all the risky spots.

My daughter never bikes alone to school. I will bike with her and then come back. Or she will go with her older brother. This means a small detour for him. As we have a car-sharing arrangement with two other children from her school, they would normally also bike all three together. It happens that one of the kids does not want and then none does it. Either me or my son will accompany the three on the trip. We have a bus stop in front of the house, but I never even checked the timetable. If one of the children had to go to school to the city, that would be different. For daily shopping I use a local small supermarket that sells products they source in the neighbourhood. I will try to go by bike as much as I can, also to exercise. I just came back from jogging. I am then using a backpack to carry. We have a car as I need it for my work, to go to clients. We also need it for all our trips as a family, including holidays. I used to have a company car but when I started as an independent, I bought a second-hand car. I envisaged to buy a smaller one and then to rent a large one when going on holidays, but finally did not do it. The same applies to an electric car. We could do most of our trips in an electric car, both professional and family. But buying electric is too expensive, I could simply not afford. I know many people in the management of Decathlon. They have Tesla's as company cars.

But they cannot use that car to go to the south of France on holiday. So, they go on holiday by plane. The whole benefit of driving an electric car during the year is given away when their whole family takes the plane for their holidays.

I am really concerned about the future. I have no good solutions, but the apartment is rented. I cannot afford to buy a house in this village. I would need to go further away from the city to find something affordable. Will I find good solutions there? Is it better to keep on renting and living here? or to move further away where prices are lower? and be able to buy instead of renting?

Quotes

I am really concerned about the future I will try to go by bike as much as I can, also to exercise. Many parents do not understand this choice and consider I take risks. (choice for kids to go to school biking).

The whole benefit of driving an electric car during the year is given away when their whole family takes the plane for their holidays.

Keywords

Risks of bike in village, solidarity, helping each other, barriers to buy electric car, biking for health

RL7_BE08, Belgium, Barbara's Difficulties Getting Around due to Epilepsy and Living in Rural Area

Narrative

I am Barbara and for the past 4 years I can no longer drive a car due to epilepsy. I live in a very rural area with scarce public transport so my only options for independent mobility is biking or the Belbus. The conditions of this service (on-demand bus pick-up) have changed and is now combined with the normal bus service so travel time has increased significantly. The nearest bigger town is 12 to 14 km away. When I go to work, I often/always have to count on other people. Someone to bring me or to pick me up but for most people this means making a detour since as I said - I live quite remotely. I work in another village and most of the time my husband drives me to a Ride & Share point from

which I then go with someone from work. Always quite a hassle to coordinate. I only work 2 days a week, 1 from home and 1 in the office (a dance school). Working only 2 days is not a choice. Working more often would just not work in terms of transport. I have 2 children and they have hobbies but often getting there is a problem for them since my husband works full time and I cannot bring them. So sometimes they have to skip their hobbies. My own hobby is dancing during the week but I am lucky that my dance friends always come to pick me up. For my oldest son - he is 14 now - the situation is improving since he can now take the bike independently. I sometimes bike myself, even bought an electric bike, but I do not always feel comfortable so it is becoming somewhat of a dread. My husband does the grocery shopping - once a week in the supermarket (in France - we live near the border) and he will bring stuff that we might have forgotten during the week on the way back from work. There is no longer a shop in our village. Actually, everything is disappearing. There used to be a doctor, now you have to go to the city. They even closed down the (primary) school. So it is not easy to live in a small village without a car at your disposal. We have considered moving to a bigger city several times but have not yet taken that decision. We try to live as sustainably as possible but we are not fanatic about it. We pay attention to what we buy and try to save energy, especially now with the high prices. We carpool, we'll take the bike when we can. We have implemented this in our day to day living and look for a balance between what is necessary, feasible and affordable. We have been living like that for quite a while now. Over 14 years since that is how old my son is and I remember already being aware of certain sustainability aspects at that time. So we limit our trips with the car, we don't use our heating too much - we have a pellet stove - and we plan to put solar panels (especially if we get to drive an electric car - discussions on that are ongoing at my husband's work - he has a company car). We don't use that much water. We still use the shower but the children have a three-minute maximum shower time. We don't wash our car or have a swimming pool so I think we are doing ok. We decided not to take the plane to go on holiday so it means we are home more often during holidays and make trips in the region - it is a beautiful region after all. The kids don't complain. My son is quite sustainability conscious, he will for instance not exceed the three-minute shower even when we are not home. My daughter, who is younger is not ready for it yet.

Quotes

I would love to be able to get back in the car and drive by myself. Now people talk about you as cargo. Who will take Barbara- even when I am standing next to them. That doesn't feel good.

Especially now, with all the prices going up, I am always embarrassed when I have to ask someone to make a detour to drive me home.

In terms of sustainability we do what is feasible and affordable.

Keywords



Disability, social contacts, carpooling, electric bike, sustainability, rural

RL7_BE09, Belgium, combining care tasks + preparing mobile independence of daughter with special needs

Narrative

My name is Anne, living in a big Belgian city, 50 years old, mother of 2 adolescent boys and a daughter.

I used to bring three kids to school in a 'bakfiets' (cargo bike). Now, the sons take their own bikes. I still bring and fetch my daughter (15) every day - she has special needs - and I assist her every day to get to her secondary school and back. When the kids were very young, we walked everything, using a stroller. A Ted's & Co duo - brilliant stroller. Fitted the baby, as well as two toddlers, and groceries, and I could take a tram. It was usually overloaded, but kept us going. When they could walk, I got the bakfiets. I used it for everything – including getting all of our groceries. We hardly use the car to go shopping either, the bakfiets is ideal.

But it was heavy and overloaded, too. I broke my knees, doing that for years. Luckily, the boys are now cycling everything themselves. I got a smaller bakfiets, electrified. It's a great relief. Since September, using it to bring my daughter to her new school on the other side of the city, her much too heavy backpack, and still get all the groceries as well. But the bike broke down, last month. The repair is scheduled - but it takes weeks to have an appointment! So, I learned again to use the tram. At first, it was very intimidating for my daughter. Strangers approaching her, following her, she felt scared. Also, we have to leave 15 mins earlier, which is a challenge. But after three weeks that we both got the hang of it, it actually works quite well. The app is very handy, and tickets are cheaper. We can even get a sandwich on the way.

I am very aware the city has connections – streets and tracks – that serve to connect as well as being boundaries. By bike, and by tram, I am really discovering new neighbourhoods, meeting new people. Did not know the nearby neighbourhood that well, now I am discovering it. I live in the city for over 15 years, would not have seen it from 'another side'. In that sense, has been a portal. I think I discover more of the local than parents bringing their kids by car. Well, we do have a car, but it's hardly used in the city, though. Being stuck in traffic, it just takes too long. I don't like to drive anyway. For going out of town in the weekends, that's another story.

But looking at it from the perspective of my daughter, getting around is very difficult when coping with disabilities. Yes she can cycle, but handling this city's traffic – no way. Too many vehicles, too high speeds. There are many obstacles, it is hard to cycle through

the city. I fell three times myself, this year alone. Despite the cycle roads, the infrastructure is not safe. Also not for pedestrians, whose space is being taken by bike lanes.

So, suddenly looking again at our cities' public transport system. Using the metro/tram system, it's not carefree. Changing over in subterranean stations, I worry if it's not overcrowded, if my daughter's backpack will be stuck between the doors, etc. I want my daughter to feel safe, be assured that she will be safe, feel safe myself. Still, I hope that in a few months, she will be able to go herself. Feeling I am combining a sustainable mobility with upbringing. In that sense, taking the tram may also accelerate her independence.

Quotes

Getting around is very difficult when coping with disabilities I learned again to use the tram.

I want my daughter to feel safe, be assured that she will be safe, feel safe myself.

By bike, and by tram, I am discovering new neighbourhoods and meeting new people I hope that in a few months, she will be able to go herself (...) taking the tram maybe also accelerate her independence

Keywords

Care tasks, disability and mobile independence, sustainable mobility, exploring the city, cargo bike, renewed interest in PT (tram), safety issues

RL7_BE10, Belgium, Aline's family is scaling down car use for diverse public/private modes

Narrative

I am Aline, coach and social assistant at a 'village hub'. I live 20 km's further on in a remote area in south-west Flanders with my husband and two sons in their late teens. We have a car, several bicycles, an electric bike and an electric scooter. And two bus subscriptions... We used to own two cars. One was an old diesel. When it broke down, we

said – let's not replace it, we got an e-bike and the scooter instead. We pay less insurance and maintenance. We got a government subsidy, as it was electric. It all helped the decision, but we really wanted to live more sustainably, too.

The scooter can go faster as 50. It can also go on a bicycle path. You have to be careful, drive preventive, or honk, as others don't hear you coming. The car is usually for who 'has to go furthest'. I usually take the car, drive 20 and sometimes 40 km's more to another village hub (but these are exceptions). I also use it for the supermarkets in the nearest Flemish city or in France. But as we buy as much as we can local, bakery – butchers, that's done mostly by bike. And, I get many things from the Village hub as well. There are bicycle paths around here. But it's hilly here. You need to be careful, we are well-lit and fluorescent. My husband usually takes the e-bike to work and back.

Beyond cycling, our sons use the bus. The 'belbus' (minibus to order 24 hrs in advance) in combination with regular lines to school. With their mobiles and earphones, I think they do not really care much about the fact that it takes mighty long.... Further on the bus-topic, many more issues to complain about. For instance, the belbus is sometimes cancelled – drivers are ill or not available - stretched workforce. Also, many routes are economised on. We need to walk 10 mins to the pickup point even when there is a stop near the house.

I know our local governments try to improve the situation and negotiate, but more economisations on public transport mean it becomes less and less an option. The frequency is awful – for instance, employees of the village hub have only one bus in the morning, the next one back is at 16:15. So, no part-timing at the hub.

I also note that the (sharing) mobility dimension of the hub is not materializing. Some carpooling, yes, and we occasionally hand-match a travel need to another trip. But what strikes me, is that here, there really is no sharing mentality (yet). Everybody needs to own a power drill rather than sharing it. We try to promote shared mobility, but the platform is no success. Look outside, I see 6, 7 cars. Nobody dreams of sharing it. Sharing services like Cambio do not get here. There is a rental bakfiets in the nearest city. That's a good initiative, but I know it's not used much.

Sharing really requires a mentality change. I am aware about it. I try to act circular. I think everybody should do what it wants, we also just do our best, within our own limits. We manage like this. It felt a bit like pioneering, many thought we could not manage our busy lives like this, or still think we are crazy.

Quotes

We used to have two cars (...) when it broke down, we said – let's not replace it.

Here, there really is no sharing mentality (...) we try to promote shared mobility, but the platform is no success. many thought we could not manage our busy lives like this, or still think we are crazy.

Keywords



Eliminate 2nd car, electric bike, electric scooter, bus transport, sharing mobility through village hub, lack of local support for sharing

RL7_IT01, Italy, Paolo, a pensioner with a passion for electric bikes

Narrative

I am Paolo, a 60-plus year-old pensioner from a large city in central Italy. I used to work in an agency of the municipality and deal with local public services. I have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time together with my wife, while my son works at a university abroad. Before I retired two years ago, I used to go to work every day using mainly a pedal-assisted bike. I would cover 12/13 km on the outward journey and 12/13 km on the return journey, depending on the route I chose to take, but almost all of it was on cycle paths. The travelling time was always the same, which is one of the huge advantages of the bicycle: it took me 45 minutes to go and 50/55 minutes to return. Cycling represented the majority of physical activity for me, as I would finish late at work and didn't feel like going to the gym afterwards. This daily routine was also very helpful for me to arrive at work already 'energised'. Although there are sometimes conflicts with the car drivers who occupy the bike lanes and are not used to bikes and scooters, the bicycle helps me to think and put my thoughts in order without being stressed while driving a car.

On days when it rained heavily, I used to take the urban railway, where trains ran more or less on time every 20 minutes and I had no specific timetable to start work. One stop was a 10-minute walk from my house and the other was very close to my place of work. It was even more comfortable than cycling: the journey time was the same, you didn't get wet, but I missed doing that work-out. The change for me in taking the bicycle was due to the fact that I changed my place of work. For a while I worked very far away, outside the city, and the only means was the car. When I went back to work in the city, 13 km from my home, I started moving with my moped because the traffic was too heavy. Then I was moved even closer and, in 2013, I decided to start using a pedal-assisted bicycle because it was more feasible to ride uphill in the neighbourhood. Later, I returned to my previous work location, but I was already used to the pedal-assisted bike and decided to keep moving with it, because riding 4 or 13 km was more or less the same for me. The change in technology made me change my perception of transport. Although I was aware that the electric bike still pollutes, at least they do away from the city compared to the moped. Another reason for deciding to move by bike was due to a survey we did in 2010 for my job in which I had to monitor the efficiency of bike lanes in the city. To do this, we relied on a network of volunteers who believed in daily bike transport. From that moment on, I started having the bug in my head because I thought: "If many people do it, why can't I cycle to work too?". As for my wife, she also recently retired as a paediatrician

in the neighbourhood. For her, the commute to work was only three to five kilometres away, but by public transport it was difficult: it was not well connected, the bus stop was far from home and she had to take two buses for a short distance. So, when the weather was good, she walked, taking advantage of it to do sport, and otherwise, she used the car. She also tried cycling but gave up soon after because she was not very experienced and found it a bit dangerous to use it on certain types of roads. Now she mostly walks short distances or uses the car or bus if she has to go further. My son, on the other hand, always preferred to go by train to the university and avoid the car because he liked to use that time to study. Now, living abroad, he has adapted to using his bike and public transport. Since I stopped working, my day is not defined by a daily routine: if I have many close engagements, I take my moped, but, in general, I have tried to do all the commuting in the neighbourhood by bicycle because it is easier (no parking to think about, you can carry a daily shopping, etc.) and more efficient: the cost of transporting a car is infinitely higher than the cost of transporting a passenger in it. For us, it's not just a matter of cost: fortunately, we don't have problems with the price of cars or gas. Since 2015, I have also been involved in a volunteer activity with Bike to School in which I accompany a group of children on bikes to school to teach them the value of cycling. As for the car, we have one in the family and we almost always use it when we are together and need to go downtown. Sometimes, if we don't have strict timetables, we take the bus to the centre even if it takes 1 hour/ 1 hour and 15 minutes. We use the car for all trips outside the city of less than 100 km: for example, I take it once/twice a week to go playing golf away from the city and once a month when I go walking in the mountains with some friends. In general, my wife uses the car more than I do, but in terms of the number of km, it is more me than her: even when we have to travel longer distances, I do the driving.

If we have to make long trips for pleasure, we normally choose how to move according to economic and time convenience. We use the train, the plane, domestic buses or a special transfer service for shared transport. In general, the consideration of how to reduce CO2 is more present when I have to choose how to move within the city than on long journeys. However, we thought about environmental issues when we chose to buy a hybrid car. Sometimes, I also use the car sharing system for short trips, when both my wife and I need to use a car. I also came into contact with activists who only use bicycles to go everywhere, completely reversing the paradigm. However, I don't think I will do this shift because I think it is possible to be sustainable using different forms of transport. For example, car sharing really convinces me because you don't own a car of a certain type but you can use it.

I think everyone is responsible for the global situation but to change the mentality in this city we would need some disincentive policies. Here, everything is tolerated and people have the almost certainty of impunity and believe they can park anywhere, even in a no-parking zone. If they could no longer do so, they would have to find an alternative. The problem is to get rid of parked cars, to free up space so that the bus can move faster and so that there can be more bicycle lanes.

Quotes

I don't find it very efficient to move a tonne of iron from a car to move 80 kg of a person.

For many people, the car is an extension of the living room at home: it is a comfortable place to listen to music, etc. Even if it takes longer, it's like spending an hour on the couch.

As a back thought, I felt better with my conscience about using an electric bike than using a moped.

Keywords

Cycling, change perception, hybrid car, bicycle activism, fighting habits and laziness

RL7_IT02, Italy, Veronica, an educator with two children, fights for a change of values

Narrative

My name is Veronica and I am an educator of almost 46 years old. I work in sustainable mobility and outdoor education. I have two children, one 15 years old and one 12 years old, who live half time with me and half time with their dad. Throughout my life, I have had different lifestyles.

I was born in a large city in central Italy and I come from a very peripheral neighbourhood (a working-class suburb), and until university, I took the bus and mostly the moped, because it was faster. Then I moved to this area and I stopped using the moped after a bad accident. I then started to use the bicycle and continued to do so when I moved to the centre of the city. At the time, I didn't have the same conviction I have today. Even though I come from a very environmentally conscious family and years of scouting, I still thought the car was the quickest way of transport. When I moved back to the suburbs and the children were born "it was dramatic" because I had to take them to kindergarten and there was no alternative for me. In the suburb where I lived, taking the bus with strollers and materials to transport was very difficult, so I was always in my car for an average of four hours a day. A very tiring life in which I was paralysed in traffic. Then I went to live in the Netherlands and Sweden and for nine years my life changed completely. I lived in cities where it was possible to choose different forms of sustainable transport and I gave up using my car. With COVID, I decided to return to my city in Italy because I saw the potential for change and I chose this neighbourhood again because there was a train stop and cycle path nearby. I am a big believer in the 15-minute city and I try, as a freelancer, to concentrate my professional activities in the neighbourhood. All my work and my routine are very much intertwined with cycle activism. I always use the bike, but sometimes, given the infrastructure we have, in bad weather or when I am very

tired, I move around either by metro or by train. I got a very light bike because that way I can load it onto public transport when I come back very late at night or to go on holiday. Train delays are frequent but they are getting better. The problem is that it's difficult to load the bike because the train is always very full. In addition, I happened to find bus drivers who wouldn't let me get on with my bike even though I was allowed to, or underground stops that are not equipped to carry bikes. Even though I know it is against the rules, sometimes I still take my bike on the escalator because otherwise I would have to get on or off three stops earlier or later. I also used car sharing through my work cooperative and I often use dedicated apps. When I am with the children, we only move around by bus or bicycle. I have always encouraged them to do so by showing them the concrete possibility of moving around in a sustainable way. The first child also moves around on his own, but to get to the bike path from home takes about 1 km and the road is very busy and I don't trust drivers. Sometimes I feel my children are in danger in traffic: a feeling I didn't have when I lived abroad, where I was even more in harmony with my children. But since we returned here, my oldest son has been complaining that it is difficult to use his bike in the city and asks to be driven by his grandparents. He has a heavier load of books and he doesn't see many classmates with bikes around him. He is often ashamed when I take the cargo bike and sees my fight for the use of bicycles instead of more polluting vehicles as a demand.

The problems that can occur on the road are potholes, glass puncturing inner tubes, risks related to the behaviour of motorists, and the fact that institutions do not take these risks on board: there is a lack of pedestrian crossings, traffic lights, 30 zones (areas where the speed limit is 30 kilometres per hour), signposting, road maintenance, etc. Even with regard to safety, the situation is tragic. There are areas without lighting where I don't venture onto the cycle path: I've encountered wild boars and once a person threw a glass bottle at me at night as I was passing. My neighbourhood isn't very quiet, but these problems don't limit my cycling even at night. If I lived in another neighbourhood, I might have more problems. Moreover, here, compared to other Italian cities and European countries, people don't feel they belong to a community of cyclists, and I feel as the alien, as everyone tells me. It's dangerous and frustrating, and I know that you do take the risk even if I try to convince parents and children that it can be done.

I see the road as something that belongs to us, to cyclists, to pedestrians. The institutions and the local police don't defend us enough or are very absent in our city on this, so we, the cyclists, have to do it by setting an example, by being seen physically and risking our lives. Then here also pedestrians are not used to cyclists on the cycle lane and think that you only cycle for fun and not to go to work, etc. So I often find myself having to stop and ring the bell and find reactions back from people saying 'It's not just for you, cyclists. Where do we walk?' I even had to fight in my apartment building to be able to park my bike. In my neighbourhood, people mainly use the car alone, even for short distances out of fear of risks, laziness, and because there is an inability to reflect on the fact that the car is not the fastest or safest means of transport. It is comfortable but stressful and expensive, and we need to break this routine. Walking or cycling is not as attractive as having a new mobile phone. People think that buses are not well connected, they are late, they are dirty and there is a fear of COVID. The metro would change a lot, but it still doesn't take you everywhere, and the change would still have to be in the values along with the improvement of the infrastructure. Here the car is a status symbol to get recognised, while using transport or the bicycle is seen as lame. There must be a

commitment on the part of the municipality. For example, we demand the Bike to School service from institutions like the bus school. It's a culture that needs to be changed and starting with working with children and the younger generation.

Quotes

I had a very local idea of travelling in the city and still believed that the car was the fastest way to get around". "I recognise that I am a different person today after living in Northern Europe".

It's not easy because as a mother I take the risk that something might happen to him.

On the cycling path you feel safer, but I really like using the road because I like to be seen as a cyclist.

Keywords

Believing in sustainable mobility, learning new transport habits, cyclo-activism, taking risks for a better city for all Deconstructing the car as a status symbol

RL7_IT03, Italy, Mary, a 46-year-old Filipina woman, likes to get around by metro or car

Narrative

My name is Mary and I am 46 years old, I am married and have two boys aged 12 and 11. I work as a domestic helper/housekeeper, every morning for 5 hours a day.

To go to work, I take the bus from home and then the metro, while my husband commutes by moped because the area where he works is not well connected by public transport. He also tried to cycle there but it is not feasible because the road near the house is too steep and many roads do not have a cycle lane and are dangerous. My husband bought three bicycles: normal, folding and then with pedal assistance but still he didn't feel safe using them every day, especially in the evening when it was dark. My children always walk to school because the bus doesn't come and they get stuck in traffic. They prefer to calculate the time on foot to make sure they get to school in 20 minutes. Even when he was younger, my older son went to school alone and the teachers and other parents thought we were not responsible parents. But I thought my son was very

judicious and I was used to walk to school even in the Philippines: I always walked with my cousins, nobody took public transport there, maybe also because it was expensive for us.

When my children have to go to the swimming pool or somewhere else, we always move by car or moped. Despite the presence of bus stops, getting from school to the swimming pool by bus is impossible because of the traffic on the main road in the neighbourhood, which means that buses pass very rarely or all at once.

The problem is that the area is full of schools and the main difficulties with everyday transport are the traffic that blocks the roads and vehicles that don't arrive. My mother-in-law, who lives in our building, used to take four or five hours to go to her family in another part of the city and back, whereas by car it takes 40 minutes. So to go to other parts of the city or for long distances we always travel by car. To go on holiday, we sometimes take the plane. The train is rare and costs a lot even though my children would like it. My older son would like to cycle everywhere but he doesn't know where to park his bike for fear that it will be stolen. I also don't feel like letting him ride his bike alone yet because I'm afraid of cars on the road that aren't used to cyclists. My other son loves to skateboard but I don't trust him to go to school on that or on a scooter. If there was a bike lane I would send them. It's a subject of constant conflict between us. My children and my husband would like to change their habits and they like to cycle together with other friends. I'd also like to cycle because it would take me less time to get around and go to work, but the return would be too tiring because it would be all uphill. I could also leave my bike at the metro station but I would still be afraid that it would be stolen. I also like to walk, but it takes longer and I don't want to wake up much earlier. Lately I have also found another faster road, but it is very uphill and to go back home would be impossible for me.

I don't see much hope for the future but I hope they improve the roads and make them wider so that buses can pass and people can take them and leave their cars. Around me, most people take the car because they don't want to waste time waiting at the bus stop, because their place of work isn't well connected or because they don't like being with so many people, also because of COVID-19. The rising cost of gas still isn't a deterrent for not taking the car. However, I have many friends who use public transport. If the transport worked it would be a really nice area to live because the metro works, thankfully. Waiting for the bus that never arrives exhausts you. It would be good to add more metro stops or have a cable car, but the project never started. From the point of view of safety, I have never felt in danger or uncomfortable on the bus or metro, although it is true that I never go out at night. Even before, when I took public transport by myself even late at night, I never had any problems, not even teasing because I am a foreigner. The responsibility to reduce emissions is everyone's but the problem is that many people don't do it because they don't believe in it. The problem also lies with the government, which for example supports electric cars, regardless of the fact that people don't have the money to buy them. There are many factors.

Quotes

My son decided to walk to school because he was tired of having to get off the bus at the first stop because the road was all blocked by traffic.

When I get to the metro, I feel better because I know I'm getting to work.

Sometimes I envy those who live near the metro and say to myself, "Lucky them, these people have no problems!".

Keywords

Traffic problems, exhausting waiting for the bus, get around easily by metro, saving time by car, family conflicts between letting children ride bikes and assuming the associated risks

RL7_IT04, Italy, Lucilla is not satisfied with public transport but can't find alternative solutions

Narrative

My name is Lucilla, I am 33 years old and I live with my mother and her partner. I live in an area of the city which is an extremely busy location for cars. Near my house, there are many bus stops and I also have a terminus within a 5-minute walk. Most of the buses departing from there are fairly new and comfortable and there is also an urban train stop nearby. I mainly move around either by bus or train, and to get to my job as a babysitter and help around the house, I travel by two means of transport to the district where I work. I usually leave home after lunch and in front of my house I have a stop for two buses that connect me with another bus to get to work. I have various bus options but I prefer to take the one that takes me closest. The journey takes about 1 hour and 20 minutes to 1.5 hours because it is a very long ride and I always have to wait for the change at the bus stop, whereas if I had my own means of transport it would take me about a quarter of an hour. During work, I walk with the child. After work, I get home around 7 pm by the same means of transport. To go out during my free time, either I always move by bus to the centre or I move out by taking the train. Otherwise, I get picked up by car. I usually get picked up in the evenings because I don't feel too safe going by bus in the dark: after a certain time, you see unfriendly people, there are a few people on the bus who may have been drinking, and the drivers drive like crazy. Even during the day sometimes, the drivers have reckless driving but at night more so. At night I feel in danger even though maybe I'm not and that's just my perception. I would like it if there were more regular vehicles and more control. In a year, I will have seen the controllers three times and I am convinced that if there were someone on board to check, the situation would be quieter in the

evenings. On the train, for example, there is always someone checking and, despite the fact that it is much bigger than the bus, I find it much quieter and safer and I have no problem taking it in the evening. I have an annual season ticket with which I can also take the city trains and I think the cost is feasible because it's based on the ISEE (Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator), so it depends on one's ability to pay. Most of my close acquaintances travel by their own means (car or motor scooter), for example, my mother only takes the car because it is more comfortable and because she has to carry a lot of weights/packages for work. I've never tried to convince her to take public transport because I recognise that it's inconvenient. Sometimes I ask her to drive me somewhere if I don't make it in time by bus. Among my acquaintances, I know only a couple of people who travel like me for fear of driving in the city. I don't have a driving licence because I'm scared of driving and I don't trust other people's driving. On the bus, I feel calmer because it's big and it's more difficult that if someone hits you something bad will happen. It's a social anxiety thing, and my family would like me to get my licence.

The main problems with public transport are that buses often miss runs or are not punctual. Unlike trains, buses do not have their own lane on rails and often get stuck in traffic with people crammed in. In addition, there is a politeness problem whereby people try to get in the bus before others get off, pushing and obstructing the exit. Lately, in the new vehicles, they have eliminated the rear door and I can't understand why. As for the roads, many of them in various parts of the city are in need of repaving and when you drive on them you feel everything vibrating. Near my house, fortunately, they have recently been redone and there is good lighting, but the footpaths, which are full of weeds, are lacking in maintenance.

I had thought about changing my habits by taking either an electric bike or an electric scooter as a matter of practicality and autonomy because with buses you are tied to the lines they operate. Bike and scooter can both be loaded onto the bus so it seemed like a good way to make myself more independent. However, it's too dangerous and the cycle path near my house doesn't connect well with my workplace. Then there are some spots where there is no bike lane and the scooters get on the kerb and are also dangerous for pedestrians. I'd like it if there were more cycle lanes to get around the city and more education for cyclists to avoid, for example, taking the wrong way or riding in zebra crossings or in kerbs without getting off their bikes. Reducing CO₂, I think is everyone's responsibility: the individual can do his or her own, but the problem is having access to greener modes of transport. Many people can't afford to buy an electric car and when you take a bicycle there is the problem of poor infrastructure. In my case, I think my mobility choices are just a matter of practicality but I'm not satisfied with the way I move because I lose so much time.

Quotes

I tried to get a licence but I gave up because I feel afraid of driving and of other drivers.

Then at certain times, for example at school exits, the buses are so full and noisy that I might get off early to walk a bit because I might risk not getting off at my stop.

Keywords

Traffic, lack of fast lanes, wasting time, feeling unsafe, lack of diversified transportation options

RL7_IT05, Italy, Renato, a Roman pensioner, travels by car or on foot to save time

Narrative

My name is Renato, I am retired and 74 years old. I live in a fairly quiet, almost central area of the city with my wife, who is also retired. I love walking, so when I have to go around here, about 1 km away, I always go on foot. I try to avoid taking the car for many reasons such as parking, traffic, noise pollution and to enjoy walking.

For things to do nearby, I walk, while my wife takes care of the house. When we have to do more shopping, we take the car to go to the cheapest supermarkets and save on offers. Then every other day I have to drive my grandson to kindergarten and my daughter-in-law to work in an area a bit further away from here because my son only has one car in the family and he uses it to go to work when he's not on smart work. My daughter-in-law used to always travel by public transport but since they have the baby she can't manage to go by bus with the pushchair. People push and have no respect for people in need: they hardly leave their seats.

For the moment, because of COVID and health problems, we no longer went out to go to the centre or further afield to visit relatives in the vicinity of the city. We used to go by metro to the centre or I would leave the car at a car park I knew. When I went on holiday, I always took the car because I like to be free. As long as I can drive, I am fine with the car. Although sometimes I have to leave it half a km to find parking, I think the car is the fastest way and I can do more things than going by bus. Otherwise it's better to walk than taking the bus to save time. Nowadays we always move around the area and don't need to move further.

If everything worked well, the area would be quite well connected to the centre, both with the metro and the bus. We also have a bus stop in front of the house. But the problem is that the area is very traffic-intensive and the bus makes a very long journey with the consequence that it rarely passes or sometimes two at once. There are also other buses that pass nearby but then you still have to change vehicles to get to the centre. Some people instead walk to get to the metro stop about 1 km away, otherwise they would have to change two buses to get there. Let's say that people with mobility problems can hardly get to the metro, otherwise it takes 10 minutes/ a quarter of an hour. I almost never take the bus because it bothers me to wait at the bus stop and be stuck like

sardines. My wife also never takes them because she now has a hip problem and couldn't wait or stand on the bus. Before, when she went to work as a hospital porter, she used to travel by bus. Then she started driving her car for family needs when our son was born, but since she retired, she hasn't driven for 12 years because we're always together and there's no longer the need to have two cars. In the past, there were no bus stops near her workplace and, working night shifts, there was a security problem and many of her colleagues were pickpocketed on their way to the bus stop. In addition, very often buses did not run due to strikes or on holidays and she often had to go to work by taxi.

From a sustainability point of view, buses in the city centre are electric because they make short routes with little traffic. Here, on the other hand, the routes are very long, the roads are very busy and there are always construction works to narrow the roads. Politicians should find a way to make public transport less polluting and reduce their routes. With such long routes, it is normal that the service suffers and you feel forced to take the car even for a kilometre and a half, especially if you have weights to carry. I think that if the service was fast and didn't make people wait, almost 70% of the population would take the public transport to save money. I think that even on the streetlights, the state could save money by not leaving them on all night. Neither on a moped nor on a bicycle do I feel safe because I see that people don't even respect pedestrian crossings and drive at full speed as if they were on the motorway. Occasionally little accidents happen and you have to argue with drivers who have no intention of slowing down at crossings. Even though we have the bike lane nearby, we don't use it because we are old. When I worked in a hotel in the centre on the three shifts (morning, afternoon and evening), I used to get around by bicycle, then by motorbike, then by car, and finally, when they banned driving in the centre except with special permits, I used to take the metro and walk to the stop. Unlike with the bus, with the metro I was always comfortable and so I avoided the problems of traffic, parking and fines. The only problem was with 'Roma' pickpockets at some metro stops but with time I realised where they were hiding and avoided some metro stops. I always did the season ticket and I definitely saved money compared to going by car, doing the calculations it cost me 50 cents a day whereas with the car the cost would have been much more. I come from a generation where it was very important to think about savings. I always did the calculations to optimise time and knew all the distances of the roads. Today, I still use road maps, while my wife knows how to use her mobile phone and sometimes stands next to me with Google Maps.

I don't see an improvement in the future. I think we are all responsible for change but the state should do more. For example, everyone started wearing a seatbelt when the fines started to increase. There is little control, little help from the police and a lot of impunity. Every drop in the ocean is something but change has to happen according to everyone's needs. We are elderly now and can no longer avoid taking the car, but in the past we did and both my wife and I always tried to walk as much as possible in the area. Today in this area, I see that everyone takes the car out of laziness even for 500 metres, even though they could walk. Today with the energy crisis, if the cost of petrol went up again, I think car use would be one of the first for us to be sacrificed.

Quotes



There are people at the bus stop down here who wait for hours in the sun or the rain. [...] Sometimes I look at them and feel desperate for them.

If someone tries to say something [to the cars running in the zebra crossing], [the drivers] even talk back to them as if to say, 'You have to let pass who's in the car, not you who's walking.

If they gave the possibility to go to work by bus without waiting too much at the bus stop, it would be stupid to go in the middle of traffic.

You think about the pollution later. In the beginning, the choice of means of transport is only a matter of convenience with respect to time and cost.

Keywords

Walking enthusiast, traffic in the neighbourhood, avoiding buses, construction work on the road, attitude of car drivers towards alternative mobility, safety issues, saving money

RL7_IT06, Italy, Zendy would like to save money but cannot give up the car

Narrative

My name is Zendy, I am Filipino and I have three children. Two live outside Italy while my son with Down Syndrome lives here with me and my husband in a large city in central Italy. I recently turned 70 and I am retired. My disabled son is almost 30 years old and goes every day to the disabled centre with an ASL [local health authority] service that offers a minibus to take him and pick him up. The area where we live is quiet but since I am retired and no longer work, I go out very little. The few times we do go out, for example to do the shopping, we always take the car and my husband drives because I can't manage to carry the shopping packages on the bus. I have a back and leg problem and the pain doesn't allow me to carry weights or walk too far. Early in the morning, after waiting for the bus for my son, I go home to do some cleaning. My husband, on the other hand, delivers bread as a job and leaves very early in the morning having to be at work at 4 am. He always moves by car because his work is too far away and if he took the bus, he would arrive too late or in any case there would be no certainty about the arrival time. My husband has always taken the car because he has always found jobs far from home without direct transport but he would like to take transport and save on the car. In the afternoons, when my husband gets home from work, we sometimes go shopping or visit

someone always by car. Until I was 66 years old, I worked and I always travelled by public transport. From here I took two buses to get to work. I used to leave very early to get there on time and I knew the bus timetables. When I arrived here in 1979 and I was working, buses ran every 15 to 20 minutes, but in recent years the situation has worsened and buses can run every half hour. So sometimes I had to catch the first bus that came by and then change to another one. Nowadays sometimes two buses go by at the same time because maybe the drivers stop to chat.

Public transportation is a great help and I would always prefer to take the bus so I don't spend so much money, but we had to buy a car for my disabled son and for me because of my back problem. Getting around by car costs a lot of money because you have to pay for petrol and insurance. With transport, on the other hand, I only pay for the ticket and I've always had a season ticket. I can usually find out how to get to a place by mobile phone using an app. Instead, when I don't have much to carry I walk to the nearby shops. If the buses were more and running more regularly at fixed times, and I didn't have this disease, I wouldn't take the car any more. Today I can't get on the bus because they are too high and I have no strength to push myself with my hands. For a few distances I still take the bus, asking the driver to lower the platform, but it depends on the driver whether he wants to lower it or not. I also see other elderly people who have the same problem and the drivers don't care. In the Philippines, I was a teacher and to go to work I always took the bus or the 'jeeps', the small private vans. Here in Italy, when I was young I used to get around on a moped, but after I had an accident I started to get scared and stopped driving because I realised that people don't drive well, especially women! I don't have a licence but I learned to drive. But after the fear of the accident I don't want to drive anymore and when I am in the car with my husband I always sit in the back seat. My son, who has Down Syndrome, walks too slow and only moves around in the ASL bus or the car. If we walked to a doctor's appointment, for example, we would be late. Then I noticed that even when I'm on the bus with my son, nobody gives me a seat. I really have to ask, otherwise they turn their heads towards the window. Even when I was pregnant it was the same. In the Philippines it's different and women, old people, disabled people, etc. are immediately given their seats. I don't know if it's just rudeness of the young people. Maybe it's because I'm a foreigner but I've seen other elderly Italians get the same treatment. Maybe it's worse for us foreigners. Sometimes on the bus I have felt unsafe because there are thieves both on the bus and outside waiting at the bus stop. It has happened to me both to find my bag cut open or to see foreign guys trying to steal a lady's bag on top of the bus. That time I stood in front of them to avoid the snatching and told the old lady what was happening. They insulted me and in order not to show fear I also insulted them, because I thought that if I showed any fear they might hurt me. My husband was angry with me but my conscience told me that I could not pretend nothing was wrong. Otherwise, I never felt in danger on the public transport, not even when I came back late at night when I was younger. I think reducing pollution is the responsibility of both individuals and the government. I often see people with very polluting car exhausts and that's not good. We put the anti-smoking one on purpose so we don't pollute. Many of my friends have cars, but as they are still healthy, they also take the bus to save money and only take the car for emergencies or to go to parties. Other older friends, on the other hand, always take the car because it is too tiring to stand in the bus. In my neighbourhood, on the other hand, almost everyone has a car and the car parks here are always full. We try to save as much money as possible by using public transport,

especially considering the energy crisis and the ever-increasing cost of petrol. We are very much afraid of not making it to the end of the month to pay the rent and the electricity and gas bills with my husband's salary and my pension. I also recently asked for a rent reduction because we pay 750 euro and can't make it. But for us the car is essential and we can't save too much on it.

Quotes

The buses would be useful for everyone if they ran on time. My husband dislikes being forced to take the car every day and not being able to save money on transport. We all have season tickets and, when we can, we try to use the public transport to save money.

The car can't be given up both for my son and for my husband's work.

Keywords

Disability, saving money, problems with public transport, need for a car, lack of respect , fear of the road/traffic, parking

RL7_IT07, Italy, Jorge lacks access to means of transport suitable for disabled people

Narrative

My name is Jorge, I am 61 years old and unfortunately single. I live in a family home for people with motor and intellectual disabilities. I have three degrees and a master's degree and I am continuing my training at university as a spiritual companion. I am very interested in human relations and working with people. I am both Argentinean and Italian, but now for my health I can no longer return to Argentina. Today I have everything here in Italy, both study and work. Here in the city where I live, in central Italy, I lived first in a semi-peripheral district, then I moved to an institute in a central Prati-neighbourhood, and finally, in 2003, in another semi-peripheral area when they opened this family home for psychic and mental disabilities. I moved to this facility thinking that it could help me with my autonomy, but unfortunately this was not the case and the institute where I am now is a care home where there is little education for autonomy. Right now, I am trying to change my home for this reason and find a more stimulating centre where I can interact with the

residents. I wouldn't want to die in here. With Covid, we've been classified as a protected category and it's become very difficult to leave here because by going out or meeting people, I could put the whole community at risk. If I lived alone, it would be different and before, until 2019, I had a life rich in human relationships outside, both in the parish and at university and with friends.

Until 2016 I used to move around independently and travel all over the city, even to other municipalities, always taking public transport. Even when I was younger, I never took a bicycle and rarely walked because it was too tiring and risky for my health condition. The area where I live now is a disaster for connections and so far I wouldn't recommend it to anyone! I remember I had to leave at 6am to go to university, by taking a shuttle bus that passed by very rarely and when I missed the run I lost the day. The shuttle would take me to another bus that would reach the university. To take the metro, on the other hand, you had to take three buses. In the city, in general, the buses never kept to the timetable and the vehicles were not suitable for people with reduced mobility. The buses were crowded and there were not enough seats for disabled people. Taking the buses was very tiring for me and I always came home very stressed because I lost a lot of time.

Then my balance started to fail and I fell many times, breaking many parts of my body. So at the institute they decided it was better for me to go out by car with a driver. Unfortunately, the chauffeurs were private and I had to pay them to go to university or for private rides, while to go to the parish or for mass they would pick me up. Today, my balance is very precarious and I have no other way of getting around other than being driven. I have to be very careful because if I fall and break something else, this care home would not be suitable for me and I would end up in an RSA (nursing home) and I would never get out of there.

Today I go to university twice a week and that's the only reason for me to go out. I travel by taxi because after COVID I won the municipality's call for tenders for taxi vouchers and so I can save money instead of paying a private driver. It's not much because the budget they give me runs out in a short time, but it's better than nothing. It's all due to the traffic because I have to leave an hour earlier in the morning to go to university and all that time I spent in the taxi is a cost. If there was a possibility of having busses that arrive on time and are suitable for disabled people, I would use them because I would save money. Most of the people who attend university with me are priests and nuns and they take the public transport or walk because they don't have a car. I think it's a community option and everyone prefers to take public transport. I think the pollution is related to the lack of public transport and people having to take the car which causes traffic. Everything is connected and I think the responsibility for change is both individual and political.

Quotes

If you don't have a car, I don't recommend the area where I live to anyone.

When I took transport it was more the journey to get there than the time I was there.

People take the car to avoid waiting.



Keywords

Disability, autonomy, covid, protected category, vehicles not suitable for disabled people, stress, tiredness, risks, high taxi costs

RL7_IT08, Italy, Nadiia and her family travel on foot or by car to save time and earn money

Narrative

My name is Nadiia, I am 35 years old and I live with my family: a husband and two children aged 8 and 4. I am unemployed and, as a Ukrainian, have been volunteering in a Ukrainian church in the neighbourhood since the war broke out. I live in a semi-peripheral area and from home I can easily get to many parts of the city by public transport. The problem is that there is always traffic, there are many bus delays and often the connections are not good and I have to change means of transport many times. Then in this period there is a lot of work on the roads that goes on for more than a year and the traffic increases, forcing me to walk for many stops to catch the bus that takes me to the metro. Before having children, my husband and I used to travel by public transport, then my husband got a car when my daughter was born and another one for me when my other son was born because it was difficult for me to take him for physiotherapy in another part of the city. Today with the car or on foot it's all quicker and you do everything. In the neighbourhood, I walk, either to go to the supermarket or to take my children to school in the morning, or to the swimming pool or gymnastics in the afternoon. The bus stop is close to home and it would be a few stops away from school but I prefer to walk than take the bus or the car because I would lose more time. I use the car to go further afield or in the morning to volunteer because it would take me more than half an hour to get to the church on foot. When I come back from volunteering, I drop the car off at home before picking up my children. Near the school it's always busy and there's never parking and the buses are always packed and don't keep to the timetable. Besides, I like walking with the children because we always chat. I even decided to change my daughter's school so that I could walk with her. When I only had one daughter and I was working I only took transport, but I had to change three buses to get to work and the stops were not very close together. Even to take my son to physiotherapy by bus was too stressful because I could never get there on time because of delays and it would take me two and a half hours to get there. At the stops it's hard to wait even in the cold and rain and you can never tell when the bus is coming because the apps or screens at the stops don't work. In buses, I've seen drivers speeding or braking abruptly and in general, I don't like taking

public transport in the evening because you never know who you might meet. When we didn't have a car, my husband would pick me up at the bus stop because he was afraid for me. With COVID then I also started to be afraid of public transport because of the contagions. My children, on the other hand, like taking public transport and would like to take it more to look out the windows. Sometimes with my son we take the train three stops round trip just to entertain him. I wouldn't take the car anymore if there were dedicated bus lanes or more buses at rush hour so that people could plan their days without wasting time. We would also need more bus connections and I would also like it if they lengthened the metro line so I would avoid taking buses and the car. Today, to go to the centre, it is easier to take the bus and the metro than the car because there is the problem of limited traffic zones and the problem of parking. Moreover, the streets have many potholes and I don't see many improvements. The roads are dangerous and for me it's important to wear seatbelts in the front and in the back.

My husband works and has a car but in the neighbourhood he gets around on foot. He also used to take public transport but he lost a lot of time because he had to change many means of transport to get to work and then home. He would be in the traffic more than three hours and he got more tired by travelling than at work. Now with the car it's easier: he leaves around 7am when there is no traffic and arrives at work in 20 minutes. We realised that by using the car he was earning more money because in the three hours he was losing on the vehicles he can now do more work and take the tools with him. I think that if he only had one job he might prefer to take the public transport. The problem is the afternoon traffic when he returns. When he worked closer, he would take the bicycle but now the route would be too long and dangerous on the busy roads. We also use the car to visit friends in various parts of the city or to go to Ukraine if we have to stay for a while or have to carry a lot of things. To go to other cities in Italy to visit relatives we take the car or the train depending on whether my husband is tired. It's always him who drives, maybe because he doesn't trust me or because he's more used to driving at night. In Ukraine I didn't have a driving licence and I took it here: it was very difficult to take the test because it was all in Italian and I had to translate everything to understand the signs and the rules of the country. More or less my friends and acquaintances have the same habits as us and alternate between public transport and the car according to their needs and depending on what the apps suggest to make it quicker. Today I don't think about the future and try not to focus on possible cost increases because I am more focused on the situation in my country. However, I do believe that both states and each person is responsible for reducing CO2 gas emissions but to do big things you have to start with yourself.

Quotes

Walking with the children to school is time for us.

The car brings more profit home.

In the car, I feel in danger every time.



Keywords

Traffic, waiting, lack of bus connections, walking, saving time, parking problems, dangerous roads

RL7_IT09, Italy, Roman diversifies means of transport by evaluating the most convenient trade-off between time and cost.

Narrative

My name is Roman, I am 39 years old and I live with my family: my wife and 7-year-old son. We are Ukrainian but have lived in this city in central Italy for 13 years and my son was born here. I work in construction and live in a semi-peripheral area. I have a bus stop in front of my house and many buses pass through the area also to get to the metro. The problem is that they only run in the morning until 8am and very little in the afternoon when it can happen that you have to wait an hour for the bus to get home. I think the problem is the drivers who chat and leave the terminus all together and so two buses can pass at a time. When I work, I usually drive the truck that carries the tools to the construction site. If I don't need the materials, I take public transport but I prefer to go by car because it's quicker and, when I stop working, I don't have to change several badly connected means of transport but I can go straight home. I often leave my car at the terminus of the metro so I don't have to wait for the bus to get home in the evening and with the car it takes me a few minutes. Then I take the metro so that I save money and it takes me the same time as going by car, also because my workplace is very close to the metro station. For personal activities, to go to church or to visit friends on holidays, I always go by car because there is no traffic and it doesn't take long. Plus, the bus on Sundays never passes. Whereas to go downtown I go by public transport because of the parking problem and the restricted traffic zones. Even in my area there is the problem of parking, especially when I arrive after 5 p.m. My wife always travels by public transport because she doesn't have a driving licence. She works in areas close to home but it takes her half an hour/three quarters of an hour to get to work because first she takes the child to school and at that time the traffic intensifies. In the city, there's also the problem of roads that are not well paved and only recently have they started work to fix them and fill the potholes.

When I used to work closer I would take the bicycle, but now it would be too far and with winter and rain it is not pleasant. In summer it was comfortable to ride a bike and I saved petrol. I felt comfortable riding but I always wore a helmet. I never used the bike lanes because they didn't take me to work but I think that with the bike lanes they have made a mess: there was already traffic, now it's even worse after they've reduced the

roads to make lanes where three cyclists go every day. My son only cycles in the park because it would be too dangerous to cycle to school with the morning traffic and the pavements are not well maintained. For longer distances, for example to go out of town, we always take the car and only rarely the train only to go to other cities. Even in Ukraine I always used the car and 7 years ago I bought a car here after I had my Ukrainian driving licence converted to an Italian one. So I changed my habits and we also save on shopping because we can do bigger shopping in more distant but cheaper supermarkets, compared to buying a few things in the neighbourhood. To get my bearings and to get information on traffic I always look on the internet even though by now I know my way around the city well. Even when we could go back to Ukraine we always took the car even if it is more tiring because I had to drive for 26 hours. By plane round trip for the whole family costs us 800 euros, while by car it's cheaper and including petrol and motorway costs me about 450 euros. Plus, I can load what I want. Instead, if my wife has to go alone, she would travel by plane. I think everyone would like to reduce the use of cars, but in winter it is cold and even those who have mopeds leave them and take cars. The traffic is already heavy at 6am and I would reduce car use if the buses respected the timetables written on the panels at the stops. If costs increase due to the energy crisis I think I would switch to the electric car which is now quite affordable: it's an option I've been considering for a while now. My friends and family use both cars and public transport as we do. The state should find solutions for the mobility problems in the city, and not individual people.

Quotes

With buses it can take up to two and a half hours, but at least I save on diesel.

If someone parks badly everything gets blocked and the buses can't get through.

If there is no public transport at the right times, how do you expect people to give up taking the car?

Keywords

Saving money, poor bus connections, travelling by metro, infrastructure problems, parking problems, electric car

RL7_IT10, Italy, Sara is comfortable travelling by public transport to save on car costs



Narrative

I'm Sara, I'm 69 years old and retired. I've lived with my 30-year-old daughter in a semi-peripheral area for many years, while my 39-year-old son is married and lives with his wife in the area. Both children work occasionally.

Our neighbourhood is semi-peripheral but there is a lot of cooperation between people and it has many means of transport: both buses and the metro are well connected to the central areas. The bus stop is near my house. Normally, I get up in the morning and come to the social centre by bus for a few stops, then after lunch at the soup kitchen, I go home and take the bus again. In the afternoon, I usually walk with my dog in the neighbourhood and rarely go to the centre. I have always moved around by public transport even before, 8/9 years ago, when I worked and took the bus and metro. There are various problems with moving around by public transport: for example, they are now doing construction work near my house and have forced us to take long rides to get down to the centre or take the bus. In the morning I always go out at the same time because by now I've planned that if I go out before 8 o'clock I don't catch traffic, otherwise there's a lot of traffic because it's the time when the schools open and it can take up to half an hour to get here. Besides, the buses are always full of people and sometimes you have to wait a long time at the stops. I don't know if it's due to the drivers or a traffic problem but often instead of arriving at the time written on the board they can arrive after half an hour. For the rest, I think the bus situation has improved compared to the past: the vehicles are newer and better maintained and if the works were finished, I couldn't complain about public transport. I have never felt in danger on the bus but in the evenings, if I go out, I prefer to go with my children or friends. Even when I was working, I always came back during the day around 2 or 3pm and I never had any problems: I knew how to time things well and I always left early so as not to be late for work. I never had a driving licence because I always thought that the cost of maintaining the car, between petrol and stamp duty, was too expensive and there was no point for me. Then with the car there is always the problem of parking and in my area there are a lot of bollards to reserve spaces for school children and to prevent other cars from parking. With the public transport season ticket, on the other hand, I've always been fine, and next year I'll also have a free travel card for people in their seventies. Since I retired, however, I haven't bought a season ticket because sometimes I walk to get here and I always have the tickets to hand. I also hope in the future to be able to continue to take transport and come to this social centre. By now I know the roads to get here but when I have to go to a new place I ask people how to get there. I don't know how to use the internet and I don't have a navigator, so I ask people or my children directly by voice. My daughter always moves around on foot and loves to do lots of sport, while my son and his wife prefer to move around by car to go to areas further away around the city. For a while my daughter wanted to get a driving licence and a car to be more independent with the boyfriend, but then she gave up even though it would have been convenient for me to have a car at home for any eventuality, illness, etc. Now, if something happens I have to call my son or the ambulance directly and I no longer insisted with my daughter to take her licence.

During the COVID period there was a lot of fear: we always wore masks, we always washed our hands and my daughter never wanted me to go out. On public transport, we were almost all scared even though there were only a few of us on the buses. When the

emergency period ended, I continued to take public transport with ease but I always took the mask with me.

I think we are all responsible for reducing pollution: individuals and the state. You see people polluting with old exhaust pipes or throwing cigarettes on the ground. People themselves should also take an interest in reducing car use. Of my friends, only one has a car and I think the reason is partly habit-related and partly economic motivation. The longer it goes on, the more the energy crisis situation creates problems. But I think many people would never give up their car because people are looking for comfort and convenience and can't do without their car.

Quotes

The road works never end.

Thinking about taking the car, I've always asked myself: "what is the use of spending so much if there is public transport?"

The state is us, the people, and we are all responsible because we are the pollution ourselves.

Keywords

Road works, traffic, waiting, parking, car costs, public transport subscription, pollution, comfort

RL7_PT01, Portugal, Antonieta cannot trust the bus service

Narrative

My name is Antonieta and I am 54 years old. I was born in Cape Verde and I have lived in Portugal for 40 years. I have been living in this neighbourhood for a year now. At first, I did not bring my children with me, but later on they also came to Portugal. They were with my mother in Cape Verde, but she was no longer able to take care of them because of her age. When I first arrived in Portugal, I could not find a house. I started living in an annex in Cascais. It was very complicated because we had no proper living conditions. We all slept together because there was only one room. We spent eight years living in this annex. My

youngest son was 11 years old at the time. Later on, I applied for public housing and I got this house where I live now, which made me happy because it has better living conditions. I have been here for a year. My son is 26 and my daughter is 23. They both live with me. My grandchildren (my daughter's children) also live with me. My grandson is 9 years old and my granddaughter is 6 years old. My mother, who is 82 years old, is also currently in Portugal and stays with me sometimes. When she is not with me, she stays at another house. My mother can no longer do many things and needs me to take care of her. She cannot live alone. "On the days when my grandchildren do not go to school, weekends and holidays, they help out. But on the days they are not home, she needs help to eat, to bathe, because she cannot do everything by herself." I only finished the first grade in Cape Verde. "If we go to work in the fields, we forget about studying. Now, I need it a lot, but back home we do not pay attention to school. But when we come here, we feel studying is very important. I know how to sign my name, thank God." My daughter studied up to Grade 7, but then she met a boy and got pregnant at the age of 16. I was working and had no idea that she already had boyfriends. My younger son studied up to Grade 9. Unlike my daughter, he is able to find more opportunities because he did not have children so young. My daughter got stuck in time because of that, and now she can only find cleaning jobs. "Yeah, that's life. You want your child to think differently, but it is what it is." I work at a supermarket in São João do Estoril.

Regarding my daily routine, I wake up at 6 am. During the weekend, I have to wake up at 5 am, because I have to go to another bus stop since we have no public transport here. During the week, I can catch the bus nearby but sometimes the driver does not show up. It is uncertain. "At 6:40 pm, if the bus has not arrived yet, we have to run to the other stop at 6:45/6:50 pm. During the weekend, I walk and I catch the bus at the other stop. When it is raining, this is not possible. Because a lot of rain water accumulates there and there is a lot of wind." Sometimes, the bus here does not come. The number 24 bus always fails. It does not turn up. And for us to get to work at 7 o'clock in the morning becomes impossible. "Sometimes we are late for work because of that. It would be important to have a bus that arrives at the right time and that comes every day, not just sometimes. And it would also be important to be better served by transport during the weekend." At 7pm, it is all over, there are no more buses at night. If you cannot afford a taxi, you do not have transport to come here at the weekend. So, it would be good for the neighbourhood to have public transport that is punctual and does not fail, and that runs during the weekend too. "They have been saying lately that the buses are going to stop running during the weekend or they are going to reduce the number of buses even more because there are few people using it. That will be very bad, in my opinion." I do not have a car nor does anyone who lives in my house. There are many people who own cars, but there are also many people who need public transport. "Not everyone has a car. And here, those who do not have a car, look, they have to take public transport, or, in fact, they walk. I walk a lot because I when I need to commute during the weekend, I do not have a bus." I charge my public transport pass monthly. In the past, I used to buy a pass that cost 60 euros, but now there is a municipal pass that is free. If I need to go to Lisbon or somewhere else outside the municipality of Cascais, I buy a ticket. I no longer buy the 60-euro pass because with the Cascais municipal pass I can go to the places I need to go. "MoviCascais is very good, in my opinion. It comes in very handy. The only problem is the lack of timetables. But, for me, MoviCascais can stay and continue. MoviCascais is very good because I do not go to many places (...). For me, it can continue forever. For others,

I do not know, but for me, it comes in handy. “Here at home nobody has a car. We walk or take the bus because we have a pass. The Cascais pass is mine alone. My daughter uses her pass because she works at CUF. She has another life, she wants to go out, take a walk, she needs a pass.” The bus stop is not far from my house, but it would be better if it was a bit closer. “The bus stop we have is not far away, but if it was here it would make it easier. We hope it will get better. But I do not know if it will be. Public transport is needed. It helps the poor a lot. Public transport is enough for us. (...) I am missing more options, more buses. Those who get up early, yes, they need it.” Because those who get up early have to take the bus further away. There are not that many here. And sometimes you walk in the rain or you are hit by road water. Those who use a car do not have to worry about that. But, here in the neighbourhood, I think there are more people without a car than people who own a car. I think those who own a car would use the bus more if we had more buses available, because it is much more expensive to use a car and the price of petrol is high. If I could afford it, I would use a car because I would get to all the places quicker. “I know if I had a proper house, I would think about getting a driving license. I always say that if I had a driving license and a car, I would get home soon. I always say that. But it is true that you spend less with public transport. There are people who leave their cars at home and take public transport. It is normal. There are so many people who spent so much on petrol and then they bought a pass. I heard a lot of people talking about that.” My neighbours also comment on the same kind of concerns about the buses. They complain that, when it rains, it is sometimes difficult to get to the bus stop, especially those who live further up the block. They also complain a lot about the fact that it is difficult to do our shopping because the transport is very irregular. It would be really important to have better transport during the weekends and on public holidays. Regarding whether the buses are polluting or not, for me they are fine. I have nothing to complain about that. It has good conditions. “When it is cold, there is a little warmth inside, from the heater. When it is hot, you turn on the air conditioning and it gets cooler. I do not know how public transport can become more environmentally friendly. ”I do not know how to answer those questions. Usually, there is someone who can answer those questions better. Look, the bus, for me, everything is fine. Whether it has diesel or petrol, I do not know.” During the pandemic, I stayed at home for a month with all my family. During that time, I was living in another neighbourhood, which is also here in the municipality of Cascais. Before, during and after the pandemic, I always took the bus. That has not changed. It was always my main means of transport.

Quotes

At 6:40 pm, if the bus has not arrived yet, we have to run to the other stop at 6:45/6:50 pm. During the weekend, I walk and I catch the bus at the other stop. When it is raining, this is not possible. Because a lot of rainwater accumulates there and there is a lot of wind.

Sometimes we are late for work because of that. It would important to have a bus that arrives at the right time and that comes every day, not just sometimes. And it would also be important to be better served by transport during the weekend.

The bus stop we have is not far away, but if it was here it would make it easier. We hope it will get better. But I do not know if it will be. Public transport is needed. It helps the poor a lot. Public transport is enough for us. (...) I am missing more options, more buses. Those who get up early, yes, they need it.

I know if I had a proper house, I would think about getting a driving license. I always say that if I had a driving license and a car, I would get home soon. I always say that. But it is true that you spend less with public transport. There are people who leave their cars at home and take public transport. It is normal. There are so many people who spent so much on petrol and then they bought a pass. I heard a lot of people talking about that.

Keywords

Single mother, travels, late buses, no buses on weekends, low education level, housing difficulties, free bus pass, elderly caregiver

RL7_PT02, Portugal, Patricia depends on public transport that does not exist

Narrative

My name is Patrícia and I am 36 years old. I live in Amadora. I was born in Lisbon. I now am the mother of 4 children. My eldest daughter is 7 and she is in the 2nd year of school. I have another girl aged 5, and a boy aged 4 who is at pre-school. And I also have my youngest daughter who is 2 years old. I am separated from the father of my children. My house is rented, but it is an illegal rent. "It's all illegal, I pay 400 euros for a two-bedroom apartment in Amadora. I cannot get any help from the State here in Amadora, because I cannot present a rent receipt. I pay my water bill, my electricity bill, my gas bill, and I still have to put food on the table." I am currently on sick leave because I have a brain aneurysm and I need to have surgery. I am a cook, but I have been at home for three months now due to this health problem. I was working as a cook for a firm that cooks meals for various schools. "Right now, I have no money because I am not working. My children are supporting me because their allowance is paying the rent. The fact that I do not have rent receipts means that I cannot apply for more help from the state. For instance, I cannot get free day care for my children, because I cannot provide proof of payment of the rent for my house." Prior to being on sick leave, I used to do more travelling. I had to leave the neighbourhood at 7am to start working at 8am. I woke up at 6am and I had to leave the children at their father's house. We do not live together, but he is the father of my four children. At the moment, he is also at home because he has a

problem on his arm. He did not need to use public transport to go to work, as he always went with his boss who also lived here. He was working in construction. “I did, I always took public transport.” I could not get home until 8 o’clock in the evening, so him being at home was helpful. It was worse when I got back, it took longer on public transport. I went every day to Vila Franca de Xira municipality. “I catch the train down at the station, but I have to catch that specific train at that time. Because if I miss that train, the next train to Santa Iria will only come one hour later. If I am not there on time, then I have to go to Oriente station, and then at Oriente, I have to catch another one, which is more difficulty to me because I waste more time given that the direction is not the same. Normally, it would take about 40 minutes.” “If the train is not late it takes me 40 minutes to get there. But recently they have been on all those strikes. We only had the minimum services. Because of that, I had to leave home much earlier, because there was only a train at 7am, and if I was not there at 7am, then I had no alternative during the whole morning. My boss picked me up several times from Oriente station. Many times, as there were no trains, I would take a bus to Oriente. To catch this bus, I had to go to Buraca.” Now, I do not need to travel so much because of my health condition. Sometimes, I tend to faint so I can never go very far. I also try to never be alone when I go out. Even my 2 year old daughter is already able to help me in an emergency and tell someone that I need something. During the pandemic, “we were at home without anything because our contracts are temporary, so we have no guarantees. The contracts are with temporary work agencies. If they do not need us, we do not work and we get nothing. (...) And, with the new government laws, we are only entitled to subsidies after 360 days and our contracts are not that long.” At the moment, as I am on sick leave, “I am at home with nothing, with no income. I spoke to the social worker...to receive social support you need to have 60% incapacity, but I only have 50%. So, I do not have any social support.” The only option I have is to wait another three months without working to be able to get the minimum income. Fortunately, the three months are almost done, so I think I will get it soon.

For me, it is impossible to have my own car because of how much it costs. I do not have that capacity. When one of my children is sick, we go to the health centre, which is nearby. It is a 20-minute walk. “I have no other way, if I call a taxi he will not come, they will not enter the neighbourhood. A lot of times, when we go shopping, we have to put the shopping bags in the car and only then we can say that we are coming to Amadora, so that the taxi driver does not say that we cannot get in. I have already been in a situation in which I had to take the shopping bags out of the car because the person said “I am not going, I am not going, I am not going “. They really do not want to come in here. I told him: “do not worry, you are with me, nothing will happen to you. I will get you out of the neighbourhood, just leave me the shopping bags inside the house. I will come with you until you are outside the neighbourhood.” And the taxi driver said no because he might get hit with a rock or something else. They do not want to come in here...” I think there should be a police station here. All the social housing neighbourhoods that I know have them. Only this neighbourhood does not have one. I cannot understand. For example, it is very difficult when it comes to shopping. There are some grocery stores here, but the products are more expensive. Sometimes, it is useful for me to go to the grocery shop, when I do not have money to pay in advance. They already know me, and they know that if I must pay later, I will. But when I really need to do some shopping, I have to go to Pingo Doce. I have to walk for some time to get there because it is not that close, but I prefer it because here everything is really expensive. There are people who cannot leave the

neighbourhood and really have no choice but to shop at these grocery stores. I also understand why it is more expensive. Because the owners of these shops do not have suppliers. They will buy from the supermarket to sell here, and they have to earn something from it. Here in the neighbourhood, we have some difficulty in accessing public transport because no bus or even a taxi comes in here. For those who live at the top of the neighbourhood or who live further in, it is very difficult to access any buses. Only those who live nearer to the exit of the neighbourhood are closer to any bus stop. For example, my mother who lives in Lisbon has buses in her neighbourhood right outside her house. “We do not have anything here, nothing comes in here. There is nothing here! In fact, there is less and less. There used to be cafés, but nowadays everything is closing down. Sometimes, it would be good to have a shop or a café open at night, because there might be something missing at home. Now, we do not have anything.” More recently, they joined everything and now it is called Águas Livres. “Now they have joined everything together, but people still call the upper part Damaia and the lower part Buraca. So, the people up there go one way, and the people down here go the other. For example, when we go to the health centre, some go one way and others go the other way, because there are two entrances, but we are all from the same place. In terms of public transport, the Buraca side is easier to access than the part that belongs to Damaia. They do not have any transport, there is nothing there. Whoever wants to go to Lisbon cannot do it. You have to come all the way down.. It is the same thing regarding the school. We have no school here. Regarding the school and the pre-school, I have to go and put my children in the one across the road.” I have to walk down the street to Buraca to take my children to school, come rain or shine. I have to walk all the way down. However, there is a school outside my house. I live right opposite to a school but it is closed. We have a lot of young people in the neighbourhood. I do not understand it.

When I have my doctor appointments, I always walk there as well. “Always on foot, always on foot, always on foot, always. There is no bus here, there is nothing here.” When I need to go somewhere by car, I have to call the taxi or Uber. But I have to go all the way down there, because they will not come in here. “Uber even came inside the neighbourhood a while ago...when it was starting. Right now, they will not come inside the neighbourhood, not anymore. When we make the request, they meet us downstairs at the station and we have to walk.” As for my weekend travels, I hardly go anywhere. It is even worse now that I live further up the block. When I lived in the lower part of the neighbourhood, I went out much more often. “It is hard to go out. If it was just me...but to go out with the four of us and then have to climb all the way up, it is complicated. I used to live at the bottom of the neighbourhood, and I tell you, I used to go out much more than I do now, because Buraca has a garden. Now, having to walk all the way down the street with my children is difficult. And the cars here, they go very fast. It is like they are driving a rally. I am afraid of going out with my children. All it takes is for one of them to get loose from my hand... I have already had a scare, so it is better not to risk it.” In my opinion, there should be more public transport because the buses are full. “Full, so full, always! Always full! And people pay a lot of money, I was in Luxembourg, transport is free there, accessible to everyone, anyone can take the bus. Maybe, if that changed, people would not use the car so much, because transport is free, it is for everybody, everybody would use it! There should be more investment in this matter. There should be a bus during school hours to support the children.” I think the least they could do is to provide a bus during school hours, a bus that goes up and down the neighbourhood. That way, mothers

would not have to go pick up their children under the rain. We do not have a car, we do not have a proper means of transport. We still walk for 15 minutes...” And the children have to go to school, they cannot miss it. I pay 40 euros for my public transport pass, but for a whole family, when the minimum wage is 700 euros...that is still expensive. On the other hand, there are many cars and that causes a lot of traffic. Especially on Friday, it is impossible. “I feel that Cova da Moura is forgotten. They only remember Cova da Moura to talk about the police, about trafficking, about everything that is bad. But they do not see that Cova da Moura has tourism, a lot of young people do. I see the tourists passing by. They are not Portuguese. They do not speak Portuguese, they are tourists, and they come to see the neighbourhood because the neighbourhood has history (...). Here there is culture, we have a lot of culture here. We have Portuguese, we have Cape Verdeans, we have Guineans, we have São Tomenses, we have Brazilians...”

Quotes

It's all illegal, I pay 400 euros for a two-bedroom apartment in Amadora. I cannot get any help from the State here in Amadora, because I cannot present a rent receipt. I pay my water bill, my electricity bill, my gas bill, and I still have to put food on the table.

I am at home with nothing, with no income. I spoke to the social worker...to receive social support you need to have 60% incapacity, but I only have 50%. So, I do not have any social support.

Right now, I have no money because I am not working. My children are supporting me because their allowance is paying the rent. The fact that I do not have rent receipts means that I cannot apply for more help from the state. For instance, I cannot get free day care for my children, because I cannot provide proof of payment of the rent for my house.

If the train is not late it takes me 40 minutes to get there. But recently they have been on all those strikes. We only had the minimum services. Because of that, I had to leave home much earlier, because there was only a train at 7am, and if I was not there at 7am, then I had no alternative during the whole morning. My boss picked me up several times from Oriente station. Many times, as there were no trains, I would take a bus to Oriente. To catch this bus, I had to go to Buraca.

I have no other way, if I call a taxi he will not come, they will not enter the neighbourhood. A lot of times, when we go shopping, we have to put the shopping bags in the car and only then we can say that we are coming to Amadora, so that the taxi driver does not say that we cannot get in. I have already been in a situation in which I had to take the shopping bags out of the car because the person said: “I am not going, I am not going, I am not going “. They really do not want to come in here. I told him: “do not worry, you are with me, nothing will happen to you. I will get you out of the neighbourhood, just leave me the shopping bags inside the house. I will come with you until you are outside the neighbourhood.

Keywords

Single mother, insecurity, social isolation, mobility poverty, no-go zone, food desert, services inequalities

RL7_PT03, Portugal, Public transport does not have a timetable that is compatible with Teresa's work

Narrative

My name is Teresa and I am 36 years old. I lived in Cape Verde my whole life, until last year. I have four children, three in Cape Verde and one in Portugal with me here. She is four years old. At the moment, I am pregnant with another one. It is just the two of us at home, I am not married. First, I came to live with my cousin in a neighbourhood of Amadora when I arrived, but was not possible to stay there. Then I got my place, paid my rent, got a job and I have been here for a year now. There are many people from Cape Verde here. So, I came to see the place. I asked people to find me a room, and I ended up finding one. I work in a hotel, but now I am on sick leave, because I fell at work. I hurt my finger- I am on sick leave and I am going to be at home for a month. I am going back to work next month, I am already tired of being at home. Before, when I was well and working every day, I would leave home at half past nine to get to work at half past ten. I go by train, from Damaia to Campolide, and then I catch the bus to go to Alcântara. It would take me about an hour to get there. And the same time to come back. I work every day. I am only off duty on Monday. I work with split schedules. If I want to see my daughter, I start work at 10:30am, leave at 4pm, come back in at 7:30pm, and leave at midnight. Now, I have spoken to my boss and he put me on 10:30am until 6:30pm, so that I can see my girl. But the frequency of the buses is not the best. "Sometimes they come very late, sometimes an hour passes by until another bus comes, sometimes I am late at work because of this." Sometimes I would arrive at my house at 1am. We have no personal transport. I do not have a car at home, nor any bicycle. I do not even know how to ride a bike. But, for me, it would not work anyway, because my work is so far away. I buy the pass for public transport every month. It costs 40 euros. I think it is a reasonable price. I ride the bus, I ride the train, I have nothing bad to say about that. I take my daughter to her nanny on foot. She has to stay at the nanny because she is not registered for the neighbourhood kindergarten. I had not yet registered her with social security until recently. But I really wanted to have a proper place to put her. When I worked split schedules, I had to leave my daughter with the nanny. She slept with the nanny. Then I thought: "no, this is not possible. Because sometimes I would go five days without seeing my daughter. I

spoke to my boss, I quit my job. Then my boss called me to go back to work because he likes my work.” When I need to go shopping, I walk to the nearest supermarket. If I need to bring a lot of groceries, I get a taxi to help me bring the stuff. If it is not possible to get a taxi, I have to carry the groceries on my bag. Sometimes it is not possible to get a taxi. Some taxi drivers stop and accept the journey. Others call a colleague for me. Some just will not come, because they are afraid. To go to the health centre with my daughter, I have to take a bus to go to Lisbon. The health centre that she goes to is in Lisbon, because my daughter was not yet registered with the health centre in my area of residence. But I have already registered her here now. She had to undergo surgery and we went to the Estefânia Hospital in Lisbon. She already had to undergo two surgeries. We also went to Estefânia by bus. Now I can walk to the local health centre. I did not have a Portuguese patient number, and now we both have one. If anything happens, I go to the hospital here, if I cannot go to the health centre first.

Sometimes I go with my daughter to see the family. “We go to Amadora to see the family, and to Brandoa. We go by bus to Brandoa and to Amadora we take the train.” During the weekends, “there is no bus, to go to work there is only one bus route. During the weekends there is one bus, sometimes it takes, it takes a long time. Sometimes, I leave work at a quarter to midnight, because it depends on the workload, and the bus arrives sometimes at midnight, sometimes at midnight and twenty. It takes a long time.” The bus is sometimes full, with people who live here. “Sometimes they are people who live here, sometimes they are not, because there is another train that goes to other areas. (...) Many people, you see the bus really full, you cannot even breathe.” I am not afraid to ride the bus. “I do not have any other option. That is the option I have to manage. If there was another option, I would take it, but there is not. Everyone drives here, but I need work. The train is full too sometimes.” People here do not organise themselves in terms of car-sharing. So, I miss my homeland, Cape Verde. “There, people would offer rides, people did something, and that does not happen here. If you do not have a car, if you do not have any money, do not have anything, they will not help, only if you have a friend, if you have a friend that can help you, or a good neighbour, not a bad one.” What I would change in terms of transport is the issue of cars not being able to come inside the neighbourhood, “especially at night.” “Even in the daytime sometimes they do not want to come in. The day before yesterday, I came from the hospital in the afternoon, at 6pm, and the taxi driver refused to drive inside the neighbourhood. He left me downstairs at the entrance to the neighbourhood.” And I had gone to the hospital with a stomach-ache. There is no transport from here to the hospital in Amadora-Sintra, only taxis. “Those who have money go to the hospital, those who have no money do not go.” In a way, the taxi drivers are right. If they come in here, the kids disturb them. Nothing changes here in the neighbourhood because the kids will not let it change. “I have liked the neighbourhood as it is. Even with the noise, it was never bad for me. I have nothing bad to say about it. But I have seen a lot of things. (...) There are parties right on the main square, there are bars, police come, there are shootings, stabbing, everything.”

Quotes



But the frequency of the buses is not the best. Sometimes they come very late, sometimes an hour passes by until another bus comes, sometimes I am late at work because of this.

The bus is sometimes full, with people who live here.

Sometimes they are people who live here, sometimes they are not, because there is another train that goes to other areas. (...) Many people, you see the bus really full, you cannot even breathe.

I am not afraid to ride the bus. "I do not have any other option. That is the option I have to manage. If there was another option, I would take it, but there is not. Everyone drives here, but I need work. The train is full too sometimes.

Even in the daytime sometimes they do not want to come in. The day before yesterday, I came from the hospital in the afternoon, at 6pm, and the taxi driver refused to drive inside the neighbourhood. He left me downstairs at the entrance to the neighbourhood. And I had gone to the hospital with a stomach-ache. There is no transport from here to the hospital in Amadora-Sintra, only taxis.

Those who have money go to the hospital, those who have no money do not go.

Keywords

Single mother, immigrant, problematic neighbourhood, discrimination, access to public transport

RL7_PT04, Portugal, Valdemar always has the possibility to use the car

Narrative

My name is Valdemar, and I am 63 years old. I have lived in Amadora I am currently single. Since I live alone, I rent out some of the room of house to people who are in need. Sometimes these people live here for a month or two, or even a year. These are people who have little money, who have children with them, and they need a housing solution. "These people have several serious problems." I have a workshop where I work and I fix some things, mainly electrical appliances. I also work in construction. There are some construction jobs here. "Wherever I go, everything gets fixed." I was born in Cape Verde,

on the island of Fogo, and I am a Cape Verdean. Portugal is my second home. I have nothing negative to point out about Portugal. I have two children who were born here. At the moment, my daughter is living in the United States and she is a doctor. My other son is in England, and he has taken a course at the conservation factory. I am alone most of the time because most of my family are out of the country. "I have no reason to complain. Often, parents are to blame for not questioning their children when they come home late at night. In the old days, it was not like that. You never took anything home without mum or dad knowing. Girls of who are 13 or 14 arrive here pregnant or with mobile phones worth two thousand euros. It's the parents' fault. They don't want to know. (...) Here, our neighbourhood, has specific people. There are intelligent people, engineers. There are all kinds of people here in Amadora. We are often discriminated against (...)." I really like living here in this neighbourhood, but I am sorry that many people who come to live here do things that have nothing to do with what our neighbourhood is about, namely crime. Because of that, everyone knows who we are nowadays. Our neighbourhood is known for reasons that are not good. "What I hear about Amadora, I never believe it. I have never seen anything exaggerated. Sometimes I hear things on television, but I have never seen anything.

My daily life revolves around my house and my work. I have my workshop where I fix things and my house is right next door. I think this area is one of the most sought after in Amadora for people to come and visit. For example, today more than twenty people came to eat 'cachupa' or 'feijoada'. I think our neighbourhood is really very important. I have no reason to complain about this neighbourhood, but I know there are people who do. I think the people who complain the most about it are people who are not from here. The things that sometimes happen here have to do with the younger people. There is some lack of respect. "No black person has ever attacked a Portuguese person here. So, Portuguese people who live here have no reason to complain. The problem is between African people. With the Portuguese, it is peaceful." We have no public transportation in this neighbourhood, in my opinion. Cars also do not come here. "Any kind of car, if someone wants to come here, they will not drive here because they are afraid. "Many cars just go to the gas station to deliver things. They will not come all the way here. In my case, I have to go there to pick up something that arrives by car. Regarding my work, I am always on the move. I go everywhere. I go to Rio de Mouro, Sintra, Cascais, Sacavém, some cities on the South bank too, etc. I travel a lot because I am called to repair electrical appliances. They come here to pick me up by car and I go there to do the repairs they ask me to do. I usually do not use my own car for these journeys. When I have to go somewhere, I mostly use the train because it is affordable for me. Most of the places I have to go to have a train station nearby. For example, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I always go to the gym and I use the train as my means of transport. I do not have a monthly pass. Whenever I need to, I buy a ticket. "The train ticket is 2 euros and a few cents. It is more economical. When I go there, there is often no parking space for the car. Taking the car only delays me." The monthly train pass is at a good price - 40 euros. For those who use the train for commuting, it is good. But, in my case, as I also have a car, it is not worth it. "For example, if I go to the Hospital in Amadora by car or Uber, it is much quicker than if I take a bus." Transport is very expensive. "(...) who wants to invest in a car, or Uber, here, they are afraid. So, no one invests in cars here. People are afraid of being robbed. That happens a lot. "Our neighbourhood, it has a reputation that is undeserved. Most of what happens here, it is

not our doing. It is people from the outside, who come from Amadora, who come from Zambujal, or elsewhere.” Here in Amadora, things have improved a lot in terms of security. It is not the people here that carry out this type of robbery, for example. Everything is calmer. The police closed down several cafés that were open 24 hours a day and they did that because people could not sleep.” Most of the people who work here are people who are 40 or older. 35, 40, and upwards. Young people do not want to study, they do not want to. They want to do other types of work to make money faster. I leave my house around 6am and get back at 1.30am. I sat on the sofa once, but I cannot now. I do not have the time. I never eat at home. Breakfast out, lunch and dinner out. It just does not work.” I think that, if they bring public transport here, people would respect that, because it is like the cars that come here to pick up the patients. Nobody touches them. I think we need transport here. It is important to be able to get in and out of the neighbourhood. There are times when I have a really bad time waiting for transport to come, and we have communicated this to the local authorities. Because of our neighbourhood’s bad reputation, what happens is: “if the person is really sick, they die. As has already happened. If there is a fire here, the police have to come first. If there is a sick person here who is ill (...), the person has to repeat 1000 times his health conditions for something to happen, and even then it is the police who come and only then the firemen and other help. We need a transport here. Very important.” Although we have the train that passes nearby, many times you cannot resort to it. It has to be a small car that can help people who are having a bad time. “Having transport here would be very important, it would be a good idea. It should be an investment for this spectacular place. I have no reason to complain about the neighbourhood. I never, ever, had. I leave my car here, often open, and I have no problem with it.” I think it is important to have more transport options here, especially for those in need and for when there are emergencies. When we call an ambulance or the fire brigade, it takes a long time. This sometimes also happens because there are people who jokingly call, and it turns out to be a joke. We also needed more transport options for other things and they could be electric. For example, “(...) with my van, I used to get food from the Food Bank in Alcântara for the people here. I never saw anyone come forward and give me 20 or 30 euros for the cost. Because carrying a transport has its costs. And it costs. So, I gave that up.” I think electric transportation is very important and we should have more of it. It is less polluting and it can run at any time of the day because they make less noise. People here respect this type of transport a lot. Nobody would touch it. In my case, my car is not electric. “That is only for those who have money. Nowadays, we have to have insurance, we have to do the periodic inspection. All that costs money. (...) And, not only that, the car has other expenses.” I think electric cars are the future and Portugal is far behind in that matter. But I really cannot invest in that and change my cars, because I have children outside the country and family to help in Cape Verde. There is another problem, which is that the buses will not go inside the neighbourhood. Many people try to find a lift by car to Damaia and then catch the bus. Or, when people arrive with groceries from the supermarket and need to walk home, they also look for a car ride because there are no alternatives. “This neighbourhood in Amadora really needs transportation. There are people who come home from work at 1am, 2am or 3am and have no transport. That is dangerous because of drug dealers, for example.” “Transport is very important. When it is raining, like yesterday, many people need it. (...) I cannot help. During the rush hour, it does not work either. Whoever goes to the supermarket has to walk with their bags. It would be very important to have a van to take

people. This neighbourhood lacks this. Buses are very much needed. If we had buses from 7am in the morning until 8pm at night, it would help a lot. There is no way for parents to take their kids to school.” When it rains, the children come home from school all wet. And then they get the flu. The parents who work and have to take the kids, what do they do? They have to leave them at the school, running, at 6:30 in the morning. It is very early. “I alone cannot solve these problems. There should be someone who is more in touch with the subject and who can help us to make a petition, for example.

Quotes

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(...) who wants to invest in a car, or Uber, here, they are afraid. So, no one invests in cars here. People are afraid of being robbed. That happens a lot.

Our neighbourhood, it has a reputation that is undeserved. Most of what happens here, it is not our doing. It is people from the outside, who come from Amadora, who come from Zambujal, or elsewhere.

if the person is really sick, they die. As has already happened. If there is a fire here, the police have to come first. If there is a sick person here who is ill (...), the person has to repeat 1000 times his health conditions for something to happen, and even then it is the police who come and only then the firemen and other help. We need a transport here. Very important.

Having transport here would be very important, it would be a good idea. It should be an investment for this spectacular place. I have no reason to complain about the neighbourhood. I never, ever, had. I leave my car here, often open, and I have no problem with it.

(...) with my van, I used to get food from the Food Bank in Alcântara for the people here. I never saw anyone come forward and give me 20 or 30 euros for the cost. Because carrying a transport has its costs. And it costs. So, I gave that up.

Electric transportation. That is only for those who have money. Nowadays, we have to have insurance, we have to do the periodic inspection. All that costs money. (...) And, not only that, the car has other expenses.”

Keywords

Discrimination, neighbourhood, immigration, conflicts and crimes, fear, insecurity

RL7_PT05, Portugal, Judite needs more buses

Narrative

My name is Judite and I am 76 years old. I was born in Cascais. My mother worked in a lady's house in Cascais and she lived there. Then I went to live to a place which is near here when I got married and I had my children there. Later, I came to live in this house here in 1974. We have been here since then. I used to work as a maid and as a dressmaker. However, when I was 40 years old, I came back to Manique, to the same place where we lived, and I opened a café there. I was there for ten years. When I started to have some health problems, namely a problem with my muscles, I had to leave the café. Currently, I also have health problems due to my thyroid. I will have to undergo surgery next month. I have been a widow for the last five years. My son came to live with me. I also have a daughter who is 51 and two grandchildren, but they are living in London. "I find it very difficult to get around here". There have always been buses here, but then the street became one-way in 2007. Because of this, there are fewer buses now. There was always a bus in the morning and another one at night, coming from Cascais. The bus stop I have is even close to my house, but the climb uphill to get there is very difficult for me. So, when I no longer have the strength in my legs, I choose to go down the street and catch a bus that goes to São João, and then catch another bus to Bicesse. "I do this circuit because it is very difficult to walk up this street, and there are not many people here who walk because they all have cars. But there are still some old ladies here who deserve a bus, even if it is just to go up the street and get to the bus stop." So, when we want to go to Bicesse, which is up there, we have to walk and it is a very steep street. I always need to stop several times on the way to rest. Then, when I get there, there is a grocery shop, a supermarket and a pastry shop. That is where I do my shopping, but my son brings the groceries because I cannot. If I want to go to Lidl or the Alcoitão Hospital, there are new buses that come from Carcavelos and pass through Livramento and stop at SOS (Aldeia das Crianças). "This bus goes to Cascais Hospital. So, if we need to go, we go. (...) Many times I prefer to catch the bus downstairs (where the restaurant is) to go to São João, because there are buses there every twenty minutes and I do not have to go up another street. There is also a girl who works at Continente who often goes by taxi because of the lack of transport." People often have to take the taxi, which is the most expensive form of transport, because there is no bus service here. This has been the case for many years now. There is nothing. If I want to do my shopping for the month, I go to Lidl in Alcoitão because it is a smaller space for me to walk around in. I cannot handle the supermarkets that are too big, I get really tired. Sometimes my grandson, who is 23, comes here and we go shopping by car. "But when he is not here and I need things, we have to go by bus and we come back by taxi." If I want to go to the centre of Cascais, it is also difficult. I have to walk to the bus stop on the way up. And that bus makes a very long journey. I have a

public transport pass and it is free. It covers the whole municipality of Cascais. I have had this pass for a long time. Before the pandemic, the pass used to cost 20 euros, but now it is free. This, at least, is good. I think bus drivers should be more attentive and careful with passengers. “The buses... They go so fast! We have to be very careful there, otherwise... For the young people, it makes no difference, but for the elderly... (...) I think they should have a little respect for the elderly. I do not consider myself old, only when I am in pain do I consider myself old.” We do not have our own car. My son does not have a driving licence either. Lately, I have been needing to go to the Egas Moniz Hospital (Lisbon) a lot because of my health problem and I need to take a taxi. My daughter has been helping me with this expense. Otherwise, I would have to take the bus, then I have to take the train, and after that I do not even know the way from the train station to the hospital. “I go by taxi really because of my health, because I get tired when I walk a lot. When I walk a lot, which is actually not even a lot, but for the state I am in it ends up being.” As for the leisure part, there is a social centre here where I often went. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the van would pass by in the morning, we would go to the swimming pool and on the way back I would stay at the centre. I would only come home at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. During and after the pandemic, when this social centre reopened, other rules were put in place and the van was no longer available for me to go there. In the meantime, I also got sick. I stopped having those activities. “Now, since I am ill, I have been ill since May, I needed something. In Manique, which is near Bicesse, there is also a social centre and my husband was even part of the management.” I went there, but everything is different after the pandemic.” Most of the people are not there, others have died and the rest have gone to the nursing homes. “I needed to do something and I needed to get out of here. That is why I went to this centre. I could not be thinking about the same thing all the time. They have a van and they pick me up here. I go there some afternoons when I feel like it, I do sewing, yoga, and chat.” Regarding the possibility of using a bicycle in the future, that is impossible for me as you can see. But we walk and take the bus most of the time. I think it has already contributed to us having more sustainable commutes. “I have the impression that those smaller buses are electric. They do not make any noise as they go. I think those are electric. The ones coming from Estoril are small buses, I am sure they are electric.” My grandson is getting an electric car. His father wants to buy it for him because he just finished his degree. He said he would like to have an electric car. But, in general, I think young people want to drive. I do not expect them to use public transport anymore because the supply is not that good either. I think they should invest more in buses here in this area, especially because of the elderly. “There should be at least two buses a day in this area. I think it would be good. I am speaking for myself. I think it would be good, because there are so many buses coming from Cascais to São João in the other part of Bicesse. And there are some old people here. If they do not hurry in changing things, then everyone will be dead and there will be no more need for buses.” The same thing happens to the other old people here. Usually, it is their children who go with them to do the shopping by car because otherwise it is impossible. To catch a bus, we always need to walk up or down the street and that choice is made according to my state of health, which has not been the best lately. “Those who live in Bicesse, if they want to go to Lidl or to Continente, they are fine. They do not need to drive, because the bus stops there in Bicesse. People there are well served.” Sometimes I even have some neighbours or friends who give me a lift in their car to go somewhere, because I am ill and it has been more difficult for me.

Quotes

There should be at least two buses a day in this area. I think it would be good. I am speaking for myself. I think it would be good, because there are so many buses coming from Cascais to São João in the other part of Bicesse. And there are some old people here. If they do not hurry in changing things, then everyone will be dead and there will be no more need for buses.

I do this circuit because it is very difficult to walk up this street, and there are not many people here who walk because they all have cars. But there are still some old ladies here who deserve a bus, even if it is just to go up the street and get to the bus stop.

Those who live in Bicesse, if they want to go to Lidl or to Continente, they are fine. They do not need to drive, because the bus stops there in Bicesse. People there are well served.

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The buses... They go so fast! We have to be very careful there, otherwise... For the young people, it makes no difference, but for the elderly... (...) I think they should have a little respect for the elderly. I do not consider myself old, only when I am in pain do I consider myself old.

Keywords

Geographic barriers, health problems, no buses, taxi, family support, friends support, painful travels

RL7_PT06, Portugal, Rodrigo uses his bicycle for all his activities

Narrative



My name is Rodrigo and I am 35 years old. I was born and grew up in this neighbourhood and have a 17-year-old daughter, but I live alone. I live alone since I was sixteen. I have four brothers but, unfortunately, I haven't seen them for a long time. First, I have study until the 7th grade, then I was father and stopped study. Later I have finished the 9th grade at a professional school with a specialization as a cooker.

I don't have a car, not even a driver's license. I have failed the theoretical exam once, and I have not tried again. Due to an illness of my daughter I had to migrate to England for some years and returned to Portugal 7 or 8 years ago. I had to start all over again. I have worked as a cooker but now I am working in a pest control company. When I returned to Portugal, to the same neighbourhood where I have always lived, I noticed that transport and mobility in the city was chaotic. I started to use the bicycle because the time and cost of transport. In the last job I had as a cook it took an hour and a half by bus and by bike only 30 minutes. I volunteered to work in the "bicicletas e companhia" one project to recover bicycles and bicycle sharing. I volunteered to get bicycles, recover them and one came along for me, I got it because it wasn't brand new, and I also recruited new volunteers, new people who were also willing to get rid of the bicycles they had at home, from the 90's and other things. This is becoming a success, it's a success in the context that many families around these social housing projects don't have, maybe they can afford to buy a bicycle for their children but they'll have to give up certain things, so this is a success. Now, for example, for Christmas the father and mother need a bicycle for their children and this is where many of these children's dreams come true. In my day-to-day life I walk to the bus stop and my colleague pick me up with the company van, but when I was a cooker, I used to get up in the morning, get my uniform and all that stuff ready. The first thing I did before leaving home was to check that the bicycle didn't have any surprises, in the morning it could sometimes have flat tyres and certain things, and I just pedalled, pedalled. I would do my normal working day, there were days when, as I was an extra in other restaurants, I would do many extras, and leave a restaurant and go to another restaurant in the Bairro Alto to do some more hours, and once again the bicycle was a fundamental support. Then this new opportunity arose and now I only do community mechanic work. Now there are also more and more bike lanes which is also a good value but they must be improved. Nevertheless, the idea is there. There are still many problems: the intersections and traffic lights, roundabouts, there are still many problems with roundabouts and bicycles and the unevenness of entrances and exits of bike lanes. The weather conditions are another factor affecting the use of bicycles. The purchase of protective clothing is not a priority for users.

On my free time I still use my bike in city. To go to the doctor or to shopping. When I need to go shopping I use my bike and I can reach the supermarket in 5 minutes instead of ten to fifteen minutes on foot. At weekend I use to go through the city with my friends. More people are now using the bicycle, 3 out of 10 of the people I know in my neighbourhood, but the older one's don't. Some, like me, have taken advantage of the possibility of getting a bicycle and use it daily. They leave their cars at the door and go by bike. In our shop "bicicletas e companhia" most of the people who signed up now, are boys and girls who are coming to 5th grade, but I know people who really work now, and for 25 years hadn't been riding a bicycle. As they didn't want to spend money on a bicycle, they knew that there were bicycles here at "bicicletas e companhia" and today they go to work by bicycle. On the other hand, as I said the bus service is not so good that we expected. The lack of frequencies increases the travel time by public transport. We need

more public transport serving our neighbourhood. The change is not easy. Many people say I'm crazy, riding a bike at this age, but on the other hand, there are many people who look at me and say I think I'm going to follow his example, it's about time I lost my belly and started doing something, and save a bit on petrol. Most of the boys have cars, but they all have a house, children, rent, bills, and the minimum wage is not enough for everything. The bicycle is the solution to a third of those financial problems. If you're the couple riding a bicycle and just riding the car or emergencies, or hospital or shopping you can save money to go on holiday. The bike lanes must be expanded, completing comprehensive and useful routes, and improved is design and information to users. The Another important issue is to consider the possibility to transport bikes on public transport. These would be important aspects to improve bike use.

Quotes

It took an hour and a half by bus and by bike only 30 minutes; I volunteered to work in the "bicicletas e companhia" one project to recover bicycles and bicycle sharing; Many people say I'm crazy, riding a bike at this age

Keywords

Bike sharing, poor public transport, recovering bikes, follow his example, volunteering

RL7_PT07, Portugal, 0

Narrative

My name is Jorge and I am 63 years old. I was born in Coimbra. I am single, I never got married. I have lived here in Cascais for almost 50 years. My life has taken a different course from my family, which remains in Coimbra. There are some people in my family that I do not even know any more. I came to Cascais, to be more precise – in 1975, at the time of the 25th of April Revolution. My uncle lived here, but he has passed away now. Currently, only one cousin of mine and her son still live here. My mother lived with me in my house until 2011 when she passed away. I was working in Cascais and became unemployed some time ago. In the meantime, my mother became ill and I had to take care of her. I did everything for her. So, I could not look for a job. After she passed away, I ended up having a depression and I am still unemployed. Before, I was working as a porter in an office building. I went to live here after my brother advised me to apply for social benefits and housing. And so I did. And now I am happy to live here. I have had the

support of democratic policies and, despite the conflicts that sometimes take place here, it has been good for me to be able to live here. This is a reception centre that belongs to the Cascais town council and was handed over to the Red Cross. I think we are well served by public transport, and I have not had many constraints in that sense. “Almost every day I move around. I go out. I have public transport close by. We have one bus stop close by, right there at the stops, which is the one that goes to Cascais-Estoril, and another one further on, which is also in Adroana, in the square above, which is the 22 that goes to Cascais. There are two buses here and I think this area is well served by transport. At least I think so, there is always transport here...” “Although there is not, for instance, a bus that goes directly to the hospital, it is not very difficult to get there, in my opinion. There is a connection right here in Alcabideche, and then I catch another bus that stops right in front of the hospital. So, it is not very difficult, and it does not take long either. But at the beginning it was a mess, it was a mess for people. It was not very good because sometimes the buses would not come, or the buses would not stop.” People were waiting and the buses did not stop. People would miss the bus and then they would not get to work on time. I went through that a little bit too. They were poorly organised, but afterwards they got it together. “These buses are more comfortable now. I find them more comfortable. I think it has to do with the techniques and technologies, such as the suspension of the bus. I notice a difference between these and the old ones. I also notice that these buses are less polluting. They are not totally fossil fuel. I have seen a few hydrogen-powered buses too. There are no buses for all routes. But I think we are well served. I do not have any big complaints about the transport because for me it is enough. But I believe that for people who have other schedules, it can be different. I think there are two buses per hour, at least on commuting hours, which is good. At other times, I think there is only one bus each hour. I think it is like this on all the routes. At commuting hours, there are more buses and at other times there are fewer. But it is like I say, for me they are enough, but for people who are working I do not know. I have heard people say that there should be more public transport, that the bus that goes to Manique de Baixo should stop here, on the route to Estoril-Cascais. If I want to go to the centre of Cascais, it is also relatively easy in terms of access and availability of buses. “Yes, it is easy and quick...25 minutes maximum. The bus from here to Cascais, to the town, takes no more than 25 minutes and to Estoril no more than 15. (...) It is fast, both to Estoril and Cascais, it is fast.” But if I want to go to Lisbon, then I have to go by train. The fastest route is to go to Estoril by bus, and then I take the train there. For travelling within the municipality, I have a pass that costs me 7 euros and that lasts for two years.

My daily journeys are from here to Cascais or Estoril and I always take the bus. Sometimes, I go to visit my cousin in Manique de Baixo, but I walk most of the time because it is not far away. The doctor also advises me to walk once in a while. I have a problem with the cartilage in my foot, so it is good for me to walk. To go to the shopping centre, I also have easy access: “I take the bus number 6 to go to Cascais Shopping. The bus goes to Cascais and stops by Cascais Shopping. And there is also the bus number 22 that comes from Carcavelos and goes to Cascais. It also stops near Cascais Shopping. So here there are two buses that stop at Cascais Shopping.” But I think that for those who do heavy shopping, taking the bus is not very good and not very comfortable. I always try to bring few things. The interior of the bus itself is not very functional in that sense. The bus seats are very narrow, and I am always very close to the people next to me or in front of me. I do not own a car. I was about to get my driving licence, but I ended up never

getting one. As for using scooters or bicycles as alternative forms of transport, I never really thought about it. I think the roads here are not even well prepared for buses, let alone that kind of transport. “There is a lot of difficulty in many parts of the municipality: curves, roundabouts, etc. For this reason, the buses have a lot of difficulty in making the curves, to circulate well. Sometimes they have to stop, or they have to reverse. The roads are narrow, they are old. Most of them are very old structures. In relation to scooters and bicycles...how are people going to get around by bicycle here in the municipality? I do not know. Some time ago, they renovated the road from Estoril to Alcoitão. They put that red zebra crossing. What do they call it now? (...) The cycle lanes, yes, they did a cycle lane up to Alcoitão. There is one there and the road is wide enough for cars to circulate. Otherwise, I know the municipality well and I know that (...) there is no physical space for people to cycle freely, and it is even dangerous. I think the roads should be improved. They are very badly prepared for the circulation of buses. The buses are comfortable and look good inside, but there are several roads where buses circulate that have very bad conditions. Another aspect that could be improved is the fact that the buses are always full of people. There could be more buses to prevent this from happening. It is uncomfortable at certain times of the day. It can even be dangerous because people are standing up, and with Covid-19, there is not enough distance. When it is time for the kids to leave school, the same thing happens. It is mostly during the school and commuting hours. There are days when you cannot breathe. There are days when I go to Estoril, by the sea and it is almost impossible to breathe, to breathe the atmosphere in the morning, it is very polluted, very gassy, very full of smog. You notice it more now. When I was young, when I was an adolescent, there was a lot of fun. 40-something years ago, at the end of the 1970s, I was young. I lived here in Manique de Baixo and I remember that time. It was very different from now. The atmosphere is very different. Worse, much worse. There was more blue sky. There were not that many black clouds, it was cleaner. “I am not an expert on the technical part, but these new buses are not as polluting as the old ones. They do not pollute as much as the old ones, I do not know what it is. They are hybrids. they work on gasoline and they have an electric part. Maybe fuel is different, it is not gasoline. I do not know exactly, I am not into the subject, but I heard they were less polluting.” It is good that there is a rapid change. But this is a matter for the Government. At least not for the City Council, I do not think it is. Public transport is dictated by the Government of the country, isn't it? By the State. All transport should be 100% ecological.

Quotes

Almost every day I move around. I go out. I have public transport close by. We have one bus stop close by, right there at the stops, which is the one that goes to Cascais-Estoril, and another one further on, which is also in Adroana, in the square above, which is the 22 that goes to Cascais. There are two buses here and I think this area is well served by transport. At least I think so, there is always transport here...

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people. It was not very good because sometimes the buses would not come, or the buses would not stop.

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Keywords

Loneliness, depression, caregiver, social housing, unemployed, public transport, bus, free pass, easy travels, quick travels.

RL7_PT08, Portugal, Anabela is a bicycle activist

Narrative

My name is Anabela. I was born in Bragança, but I went to live in Lisbon when I was 2 years old because my father was transferred to Lisbon. I am a nurse and sometimes I teach in a technical-professional course at the Red Cross. I live with my partner, and we have a daughter that we adopted. I lived in my parents' house in Lisbon until I was 40. Then, I went to live in a neighbourhood in Lisbon when I became financially independent. I lived there for 15 years. Now, I had to move to this area because of the real estate speculation. As for my studies, I took a course then I completed a degree in nursing, and later I finished a specialization at the Catholic University. I have always worked in hospitals. First, I worked at the hospital for six years. Then, I went to another hospital (private), which was just starting to emerge. I was at the there for eighteen years. Later, I moved to another hospital from same group to be closer to home. Afterwards, I moved yet again and went to work at one more hospital of same group. I always travelled by car during years. Then, when the 2008 crisis happened, I had to reduce my expenses, because I was living alone. I really had to save money. The interest on loans had skyrocketed and so I needed to adapt to this situation. The effort to maintain the same standard of living I had was much greater. So, I started taking public transport. "It was

really difficult, because in the morning it always went well, but at the end of the day, after 12 hours of work, it went very badly. Either I did not turn up, or I turned up half an hour later..." I used to go by bus all the time for 1 or 2 years, but I had to give it up because I could not take it anymore. "It was awesome for me because I was able to read. I liked it a lot. I was able to read, I was doing things I did not normally do when I was going by car. I was always thinking about where the car park was, where I was going to park the car, if I had a parking space, etc, etc. So, that was a phase of my life when I spent one year, two years trying to do this route by public transport, but then I gave up because sometimes I got home at 10 o'clock at night. It was boring. I left work at 8 o'clock at night, at 8:30 I was at the bus stop. The buses were all full, I could not get on." So, I decided to go back to using the car. I had a colleague who was an anaesthetist and also lived in Ajuda, and he went to the hospital by bike. And I asked him how he did that because it was still a long distance. I tried cycling the same distance, but I could not endure the journey. "I always thought it was really cool, I did it once or twice to see how it was, with a traditional bicycle. But then, when I went to live for Lisbon. I would get off the bike because I did not have the strength to pedal up the hill. It would take me 20 minutes to ride up there, and I would get there really sweaty". Then, I started studying the possibilities of living nearer my workplace and I applied to work in another hospital. At this same time, I adopted a two-year-old child and my life changed completely. So, this change of house made even more sense to me. With this move, I tried the bike again because it was closer to my workplace. I started to use the bike a few times. Then, it became more complicated because I needed to take my daughter too. So, I tried another type of bike that was electric and it was possible to carry my daughter. "I applied for the environmental subsidy, along with the support that the city council was giving, which was 500 euros. So, I managed to get 1,500 euros. So, the bike cost 5,000 euros and I had 1,500 euros." From then on, my commutes were always by bike. "There is no Winter, there are no other seasons either. There is just suitable clothing. You adapt and it is very funny because last Winter there was a time when I did not bring Bianca, that is, I would come home, get in the car and go get her because it was cold. This year I am not doing that, this year I say to my daughter 'Bianca, put on your trousers, put on a warm coat and let's go'". When this last rain came a few days ago, I said to my daughter "Bianca, what you are going to experience today is what people rarely experience, make the most of it." And she was super happy and living the whole adventure. At the end, we even took a picture together. People always think that she might get sick or something, but actually she is building resilience in her body and also in her mind. There are some problems with cycling. For example, there are few cycling lanes. "I do not come across any cycle lanes, except for a bit in Algés. We cannot walk on the pavements, but it ends on the pavements, so you either get out and do the whole route, or you go through Avenida da Índia." On the other hand, there is also the problem of lack of civility. People do not respect the cyclists or the speed limits. Since I have been cycling more, I have started to obey the speeds when I drive because it is something very important for the cyclists on the road. My daughter now also uses her own bike, but there are areas where she feels less safe, and I also think it is better if she does not ride there because there are no cycle lanes. So, I keep her bike inside my bike, and then after a certain part of the route I give her the bike. As for shopping, I usually take some bags to bring the products. The bicycle has a basket in the front. "I usually do my shopping here. For instance, if I go to the post office, I go by bike. If I have to go to the pharmacy, I go by bike. If I have to go anywhere, I go by bike. At the moment, I only use

the car – and I have not managed to stop doing that yet –, when Bianca goes to the ballet in Lisbon.” In this situation, I have to use the car because of the hills. The bike’s motor starts to move more slowly and it is difficult. When shopping, it is the same thing and so I have to be careful.” Regarding the future of sustainable transport, “I think that the paradigm has to change, and for the paradigm to change there has to be political will, and right now I do not think there is political will. I think we should reinvent the city for public transport and for people. The bicycle is part of this package, but I do not even think it is the priority. Not everyone is going to ride a bike and they do not have to ride a bike. It is just another possibility.” There are still many issues to improve in terms of parking for bicycles, scooters, etc. There is not enough parking and, in the case of scooters, they are often in the middle of the pavement where people need to walk. “I think it is bad that scooters are not properly parked. They park them on top of cycle lanes and pavements, etc...” For me, it is not sustainable to have more cars. We cannot have more cars. I wonder how anyone can get stuck in traffic for hours in the same place. The solution is also not to make cars electric because the traffic problem would continue. For me, the solution is really about using other means of transport. “I look and think how is it possible for people to afford to be stuck for half an hour in the same place in traffic. It is not about turning cars into electric cars, firstly because electric cars also have a consumption of the batteries and so on, but it has to do with the fact that it is not possible to have more cars...” “I would really like there to be a political will to make all this work, to make transport work. People should leave their cars at the entrance of the city and move through the city by public transport. This way, the city would belong to the children and to all of us. (...) When I was in Switzerland their tram network was excellent, I remember that a tram was always passing every five minutes and that made people adhere to it a lot. So, I think the barriers are about building easily accessible lanes for public transport. Changing public transport to more sustainable forms.” Regarding the time of the pandemic, I have an idea that there were more people using the bicycle. I am not sure. “I was the only lucky one who could go out, I went out every day because I am a nurse ... There was a time when I thought yes, there is a lot less cars circulating, I do not know if it was because a lot of people were teleworking and people were at home more, they saved on that.” After working at home was no longer compulsory, I have an idea that there was an avalanche of cars on the streets. I even think car use increased after the pandemic. The streets became emptier.

Quotes

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Keywords

Bike, sustainable transports, paradigm, public transports, transport policies, car traffic

RL7_PT09, Portugal, Ana wants to be respected by bus drivers

Narrative

My name is Ana and I am 27 years old. I was born in Cape Verde and I came to Portugal when I was 10 years old. I have two children. One of them is 6 years old and the other is 14 months old. I used to live with my mother, but when my first child was born, I applied for public housing. I was able to get this house, but I am not at all satisfied because I wanted a house in a parish of Cascais, where my relatives are. I live here alone in this house. I used to live with the father of my children, but we are no longer together. He has gone to live with his mother. I studied in Cape Verde until 5th grade, and then I finished the 10th grade here in Portugal., I ended up giving up school when I was doing the 11th grade. Then, I went to DDV and I completed a receptionist telephone operator course. I did an internship at the Cascais city council which lasted for six months. I was supposed to keep working there, but then I got pregnant. When my son was born, I went there to try to get my job back, but I had no success. I could not get that job anymore. Currently, I am working in a school in a project . It is a project that helps children and young people in schools. It is very good because we learn from the children and they learn too. We play games with them during the school breaks. Our project is very admired by the community and we are being very helpful at the schools. I do not earn much from this project, but it is something. I only have my children's allowance which is 260 euros and with this project I earn another 250 euros. Sometimes I wait for the bus for a long time. Today, for instance,

I was at the bus stop from noon until 1:10pm. The bus was supposed to arrive at 12:20. The bus driver passed by the bus stop where I was at twice and he never stopped. These buses are smaller and make less noise. That does not help. “I think at this rate I will not be able to keep my job because I cannot arrive on time. The bus passes by but it does not stop. This month’s wages will be 119 euros. They do not understand. I make a big effort and I am at the bus stop on time. It is not my fault, but they deduct the delays from my salary. In that case, I prefer to leave this job and stay at home. It is not worth it.” “The bus that is hardest to catch is the 33 when I go to work. When I need to go shopping, I take another bus and I have no problems. Those buses are different. They are big buses and I can hear them from far away when they are on their way. So, I just raise my hand to signal. The only bus that is really problematic is the 33.” My daily routine and my travel arrangements are like this. I wake up at 6:30am and get my children ready. My youngest son goes to the day-care centre next door, and my other son’s school is also nearby. I walk my children to and from school because it is near our house. Then, I come home and I prepare some things for dinner time. Then, I will take my shower, get dressed and I go to the bus stop around 11:50am to catch the midday bus. The problem is that sometimes I do not get out until 1pm or 2pm. Then, I go back home and pick up my children. I prepare dinner and I bathe the children around 7.30pm. When I need to go shopping, I also take the bus. I carry the bags. We have supermarkets nearby. If I go to ALDI, I walk because it is close by. But if I have to go to another supermarket, I take the 22 bus and it is also close by. I send my children to my mother’s house, which is in a parish of Cascais , during the weekends. This is where my mother, my sister and my brothers live. They are all there. My children stay there from Friday to Sunday. We also go by bus. We take the 22 bus that goes straight there. “I can carry everything. I put the baby in the pram and I put the bag with their clothes in the pram too. My 6 years-old son also helps a lot. He has learned to help from a young age. He knows that his mother cannot see and that his father also has a poor sight, so he helps a lot.” The only person in my family who owns a car is my older brother, but he migrated to France. When I need to go to Lisbon ,we take a bus that goes to Carcavelos or Paredes, then we take the train to Cais do Sodré, and then we take a boat to the south bank. There are some good things to say about public transport. We cannot just say the not so good things. I have a free public transport pass here in Cascais and this is very good for me. “Buses have also improved a little bit on the inside. In the past, buses did not have a sound to warn about the next stop. Now, they even say the name of the stops. We complained a lot, so they put this voice on the bus saying the name of the stops.” I called MobiCascais to complain several times. In my opinion, what needs to be improved is that more care to people using buses is needed, especially at bus stops. They should pay more attention to the way they pass at bus stops. Many times, they pass by and do not even stop. Buses pass two or three times, they see that the person is still there and they do not even open the door. Today, the driver was telling me “We are obliged, when we see someone with a disability at the bus stop, to stop and ask”. But here in Cascais, they never do that. They never stop, neither the big ones nor the small ones, to ask if I needed a bus.

Quotes



I think at this rate I will not be able to keep my job because I cannot arrive on time. The bus passes by but it does not stop. This month's wages will be 119 euros. They do not understand. I make a big effort and I am at the bus stop on time. It is not my fault, but they deduct the delays from my salary. In that case, I prefer to leave this job and stay at home. It is not worth it.

The bus that is hardest to catch is the 33 when I go to work. When I need to go shopping, I take another bus and I have no problems. Those buses are different. They are big buses and I can hear them from far away when they are on their way. So, I just raise my hand to signal. The only bus that is really problematic is the 33.

I can carry everything. I put the baby in the pram and I put the bag with their clothes in the pram too. My 6 years-old son also helps a lot. He has learned to help from a young age. He knows that his mother cannot see and that his father also has a poor sight, so he helps a lot.

Buses have also improved a little bit on the inside. In the past, buses did not have a sound to warn about the next stop. Now, they even say the name of the stops. We complained a lot, so they put this voice on the bus saying the name of the stops.”

Keywords

Single mother, visual disability, migrant, walking, free pass, bus sounds, street sounds

RL7_PT10, Portugal, Cycling is a world of advantages

Narrative

I'm a 40-year-old single woman from Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. In Brazil I worked as a car mechanic for VW. I've been living in Portugal since 2009. I work as a mechanic in a bike workshop in Lisbon. She lives nearby. She loves her independence by riding a bike. It is also healthier for the body and mind. She is also aware that riding a bike is more sustainable. She is now on sick leave due to a recent heart surgery but really wanting to go back to work. She goes to work by bike using the bike lanes of the Eastern part of Lisbon. She does not like the behaviour of people who leave e-bikes on the sidewalks. When she needs to carry heavy shopping bags, she calls a uber. If she goes to a party she goes by public transport because of sweating. If it rains a lot she feels very cold and takes the bus. She loves to cycle also for leisure and now

that she cannot cycle due to her heart condition. She complains of drivers who invade the cycling lanes. She also likes to run and walk because she feels full of energy when she does that. She advises her friends and work mates to walk and to cycle, instead of driving the car. She used to ride a bike in Brazil but less than here because it is unsafe and drivers do not respect bikers. For the future she fears that bike lanes will not expand as much as it should and the bad behaviour of people who leave e-scooters and bikes anywhere. People even through e-scooters and bikes into the river. The enterprises running these businesses should have stations to park the bikes. She also fears that the number of bikes will decrease because of bad use. Her great hope for the future is to end polluting buses and cars, and convince people to use bikes. This would be better for people's and for the planet's health.

Quotes

I prefer 1000 times more to give a good bike ride than wanting for the bus and taking a lot of time to get to places

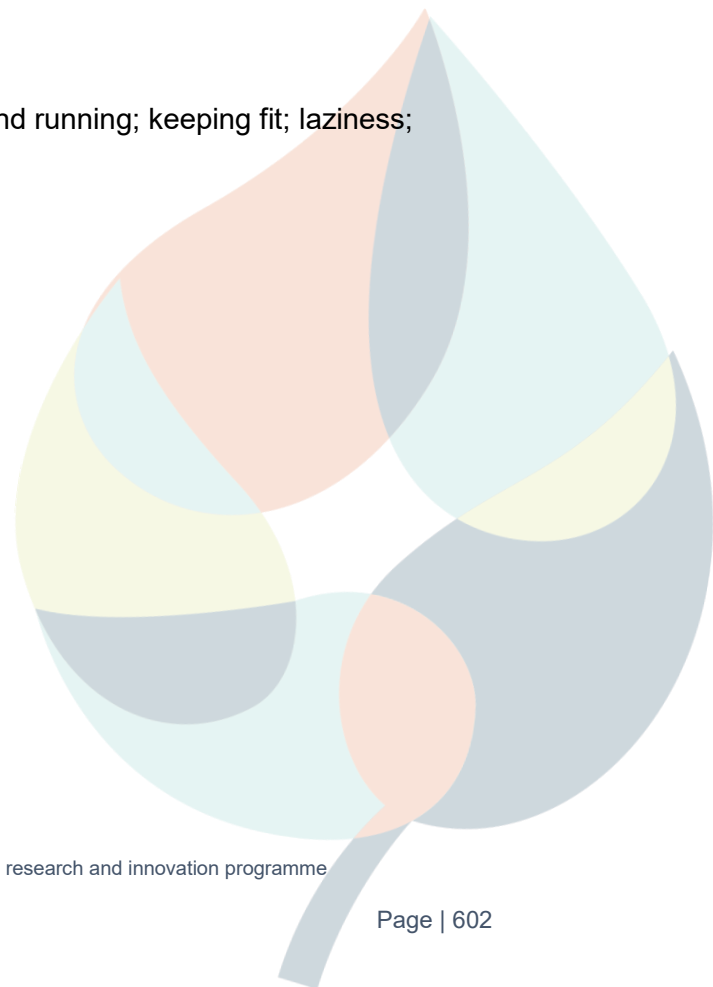
Being on sick leave is affecting my mental health. I want to go back and ride my bike.

I can't stand the attitude and behaviour of people who leave e-scooters and bikes all over the place.

If you ride a bike you can get to places faster and don't waste time in the traffic inside a bus that stops and starts an entire trip.

Keywords

Healthy life; faster mobility; independence; cycling and running; keeping fit; laziness; planet's health; mental well being



Research Line 8: Post-lockdown sustainable mobilities: centring cycling and walking

RL8_PT01, Portugal, Marcelo used the taxi during the pandemic

Narrative

My name is Marcelo and I am 71 years old. When I was two years old, I went to live in Angola with my family. We built our life there. I studied in a college in Angola. I did the admission exam but I did not pass, then I did not go to the final exam. My mother died there, and then my father died the following year. My sister, who was in Nova Lisboa, also died. Then, the war started and we came back to Portugal in 1965.

In Angola, I was a locksmith. When I returned, I lived in the Algarve for fourteen years. I worked in hotel maintenance and cleaning. Then I came to live in Trajouce, repairing petrol pumps. But then I started to be a house painter. My mother is dead, my father is dead too. Only my one sister and my one brother are alive, everyone else is gone. I talk to my brothers once in a while, but I have to be the one to call them. They live far away. My sister lives in Ovar and my brother lives in Guarda. I have two sons, who were born ten months apart. They are 44 and 45 years old. I was married in 1966, but I am separated. My wife filed for divorce, so I have been divorced since 1984.

Today I live in a neighbourhood of Cascais . I arrived here in 2019. I have lived in in rented houses, annexes and so on. I never had my own house, except for when I was married. Other than that, I lived in rented houses or I occupied empty houses. I do not like Lisbon, I used to go there. I was a house painter and I worked in Tires for many years. But I smoked a lot, I was in hospital in 1981 and in 2021. In 2021, I left the hospital. I started to see that they were always moving me from room to room...and I started to notice it and said "Ah, I am leaving, I am leaving". So, I had to sign a statement of responsibility. I signed it and I left, they gave me a mask, that was when they told me there was the pandemic. I was in hospital for two months on oxygen. Even now, I need to go there, but I will not go because the cases of COVID are increasing and I do not want to die. I spend my days "sitting here looking at the television. Then, when I need something I go shopping, that is when I leave the house. But I walk there...I still walk down there, I try to do gymnastics, my doctor says I have to walk. Now I have an appointment next month, I have to walk and do gymnastics to see how I walk..." I spend the morning at home

watching television. Then I cook my own meals. When I go shopping, I go to the ATM first to withdraw money. Then I go to the supermarket. Sometimes, I go to the bakery or the post office. “If the bag is not too heavy, I take the bus. If it is heavy, I take a taxi, because if I go from down here to up here, I have to stop all the time, you know. Money for the taxi, money for the shopping, it is a lot. And a young man who lives here, not here, he lives up here, he saw me, an African boy, he sees me carrying the bag. I said to him: ‘hey, if you could help me...’ and he carried the bag to my house.” I have a car, but I cannot afford it. I want to try and return it, but they are stalling. They want to go to court. I have a public transport pass. It costs 7 euros a month. In terms of public transport, “there is only public transport down there, it is ok to go there, but up there, every 100 metres I have to stop and that is the problem, that is why I always come by car.” “At the roundabout, that is where the buses pass, everyone says, I have got my upstairs neighbour here with a cane and everything. He has to make a...you know what I mean. There are so many buses. There is one that only takes one passenger. There are others that take more, but there are some that only take one passenger. There should be a bus stop here.” In terms of transport, “it is very bad. They are very crowded now when it is rush hour. People complain sometimes because of that. The line 31 bus, when it was rush hour, we had one every 10 minutes. Now, there are places that people do not want to go, you know what I mean.” “If I am there waiting for the line 13 bus, sometimes it takes one hour to arrive. And there are some line 13 buses that do not even appear, only after one hour, if that happens to me I will get help, you know.” We have already tried to organise ourselves to solve the situation. “Ah, that guy who lives here, he went to the Town Hall and he collected signatures but until today, nothing has been done, you know. That poor fellow has someone who comes to fetch him, his colleagues come to fetch him, , they live up here.... that is our life...” The buses do not even belong to the Town Hall now. They used to belong to the municipal company, but now they belong to a Spanish company. Some people in the neighbourhood have cars, but there are many people who do not. I only know one person who uses a bicycle: an African boy who lives on the first floor of my building. At the time of the pandemic, I went shopping anyway. I had a box of masks at home, a bottle of alcohol-gel. At that time, I used to go more by taxi, because I had more money. Now the prices are increasing, so I take the bus more. During the pandemic, I stopped smoking, I had no tobacco. Now the prices of everything are increasing. If I had a bus closer to home, it would be better, because I would not have to pay for a taxi. No one offers riders to other people here. No one offers riders because everybody is afraid. I am afraid as well. “I never walk on the street during the evening, when I go shopping. For example, when I go to the hospital, sometimes the appointment is at 4pm, but I will be at home by 5pm.” For transport to be more sustainable, what we need is for public transport to stick to the timetable. I do not know what fuels they use, but there are old buses. I have been in a situation where the bus broke down.

Quotes

Sitting here looking at the television. Then, when I need something I go shopping, that is when I leave the house. But I walk there...I still walk down there, I try to do gymnastics, my doctor says I have to walk. Now I have an appointment next month, I have to walk and do gymnastics to see how I walk...

If the bag is not too heavy, I take the bus. If it is heavy, I take a taxi, because if I go from down here to up here, I have to stop all the time, you know. Money for the taxi, money for the shopping, it is a lot. And a young man who lives here, not here, he lives up here, he saw me, an African boy, he sees me carrying the bag. I said to him: 'hey, if you could help me...' and he carried the bag to my house.

In terms of public transport, "there is only public transport down there, it is ok to go there, but up there, every 100 metres I have to stop and that is the problem, that is why I always come by car." In terms of transport, "it is very bad. They are very crowded now when it is rush hour. People complain sometimes because of that. The line 31 bus, when it was rush hour, we had one every 10 minutes. Now, there are places that people do not want to go, you know what I mean.

If I am there waiting for the line 13 bus, sometimes it takes one hour to arrive. And there are some line 13 buses that do not even appear, only after one hour, if that happens to me I will get help, you know.

Keywords

Pandemic, health issues, insecurity, housing, post-colonial, working class, loneliness

RL8_PT02, Portugal, Frederica did not use public transport during the pandemic

Narrative

My name is Frederica and I am 54 years old. I am a single mother and I have four children. I was born in São Tomé, but I was brought up in Portugal and I intend to stay here. I have been living in Portugal for 48 years. I started school here when I was 7 years old and I studied up to 6th grade. After school, I worked as a nanny in a few houses. Then, my father took me to work in Sintra. Later, I came to work here. At the moment, I have two jobs. I am a cleaner at a rehabilitation centre and I also work as a dishwasher in a restaurant. My children were born in Portugal and they are now 36, 33, 29 and 18 years old, respectively. I have lived here in Bairro da Torre for 34 years. I have always lived here in this neighbourhood, but I only came to live in one of the houses here about 17 years ago. Before that, I lived in another street. I have always used public transports to go to work. My children never had to use public transport because school was close to home, and they used to walk. My youngest son has to use public transport to go to school

because he studies in Lisbon, in Pina Manique, and he is in twelfth grade. My two youngest children have finished high school, and the other two older ones only finished ninth grade. Three of my children still live with me in my house. Sometimes I am in my house, sometimes I am in my father's house, so I actually have two houses. "I live on the fourth floor and my father lives on the third floor. My father is already a disabled person, and since he cannot be alone, I keep him company. Either me or my daughter." The houses are in the same building. Currently, my older children use public transport to get to work. The problem is that public transport is never on time. When I go to work, I wake up before 6am and work next door until 9am. Then, I leave here at 9.30am and I catch the bus at 10am to go to my other job at the restaurant. Then, I leave at 5.30pm and I go home. "My boss lets us leave at 5:30pm, so that we can catch the 5:50pm bus, because we only have another bus an hour later. There should be one more bus per hour, because there are many people coming back from work. During the morning, the buses are full and it is the same during the afternoon. There is no place to sit down. We are all packed like sardines. If there is an accident, we are vulnerable. If there is a sharp turn, we will hurt ourselves." Many people take the bus to go to work, and most of them are immigrants, especially people from Guinea, Angola, Cape Verde, Brazil... Many people on the bus are coming from jobs linked to the hotel industry, others come from doing domestic work in other people's houses. There are also many people who come from construction sites that take the bus. But these people are not only from this neighbourhood. Many come from Lisbon by train, then they take the bus to Cascais. "The public transport here in the neighbourhood is a bit complicated. The buses do not always arrive on time, and the bus over there is the same thing. For example, during the weekend, if I do not rush myself, I can never catch the bus. It always comes too early, because there are few people. It comes too early and takes off, and I end up missing it. Then, I have to take an Uber or a taxi, or go by bike." The public transport here really does not have a proper time. I think they have been in conflict with the city council and so we have these problems. "There are a lot of complaints about the transport." People here have sent letters. Some people even go to the bus company's office. Sometimes, they even argue inside the buses, because of the timetables, but the drivers are not to blame either. It has been like this since the company that runs the buses has been in conflict with the city council. I think they lost a public tender, I am not sure. Here, in this area, the 404 bus passes. Then, there is the 403 bus, the 405 and the 415. We are well served by buses. The problem is really the timetables and the fact that they are not following the timetables.

We have the normal pass for 40 euros for those who go to Lisbon. Those who only travel here in the area, which is my case, buy the municipal pass, which is free. When I go to work in the restaurant, it is only three minutes by bus. If I walk it is half an hour. Sometimes I also go by bike when I miss the bus. I am the only woman in the neighbourhood who uses a bicycle. I like using a bicycle, but sometimes it is difficult to use it so often because I am not so young anymore. And I do not just use the bike for work, sometimes for health reasons I cycle when I am on holiday. Or I go for walks. I was obese and my doctor already told me that I need to continue because I gained 3kg when I was on sick leave for 5 months due to an arm injury. On the coldest days or when it is raining, I don't use a bike. I take an Uber or a taxi if I miss the bus. I have an idea that people here in the neighbourhood use public transport for many things, especially to go to work, but many also use the car. But, for instance, it is very difficult to go shopping by bus. If you do not have a car, you have to call a taxi or an Uber, because the shopping bags

are heavy. I do not have a car or a driving license, and only one of my children has a driving license. “My middle children use the bikes a lot, and my youngest son does too. He is always on his bike. He goes to São João by bike. He goes to school by bike. Sometimes, to go to school, he would take his bike to Cascais. Then he would get on the train, and then he would go to school there.” When the pandemic started, “my life stopped, my life stopped, my head felt foggy. Everything was strange to me. I could not see anyone in the street, I could not work, so I would go out, I walked all over, I went to Guincho on foot, I would come and go, come and go. Until the time came when we could not go out during the weekend, we would go spend time in the street until the cops showed up and we would have to go home.” Life here in the neighbourhood became very sad. “Sad, very sad. The park here used to be full of children during the weekend, and during the pandemic you could not see a single soul.” I was out of work at the house cleaning job and was getting some layoff money from my other job. For shopping, I still went when I needed to, but I had to stand in a huge queue to get into the supermarket. I usually walked because Lidl is next door. In terms of movement, you saw far fewer people on the street and of course fewer cars as well. Everything was at a standstill. But now everything is back to normal. The chaos with the movement of cars and lack of parking space has returned. “Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday is the day of chaos here in the neighbourhood, because of the cars of the people coming to the vaccination centre. People come here from other neighbourhoods. At the time of the pandemic there were fewer buses, but they still existed. In my case, I always walked. I did everything here. I did not need to take buses or drive.” I think the buses use biofuel because they do not make much noise. I do not know if they are electric. But they do not make as much noise as the others did. “These buses are new, so they must be a bit electric.” If the timetables were better, I believe more people would use the bus here because the price of petrol is increasing a lot. For example, “there is a lady here who now leaves her car here next to her house, and she is going to Cascais by bus.” We also need more buses. Instead of running every hour, they should run every half hour. People would use the bus more, if it was like this. We would not feel so uncomfortable. Regarding the bicycle, it is true that not many people cycle to work, but the bicycle lane we have is important and it is very much needed. “(...) the bicycle lane is very much needed. It is always full during the weekend. Weekend, afternoons, at this time of the day, for example, there are a lot of people there, and during the morning there are also a lot of people there. The cycle lane is very much needed. It was a good investment by the city council.” People use it when they are on holidays or during their free time. For me, using more sustainable transport would be using more buses and walking more. When I have time I even walk, but I am almost always in a hurry and always very busy. In the case of buses, when I miss one, I do not have another one. I will only have another bus an hour later. Because of that, I have to call an Uber or a taxi. This happens even more often at the weekend, when the bus passes earlier than usual. It is that timetable problem I mentioned earlier. I also think there should be more respect for those who use public transport, but also from the drivers. Sometimes I was waiting for the bus and they closed the door and I had not even got in. This was all because they were late and not keeping with the timetable. “The kids would stone the bus because the drivers would not open the door. They passed by, saw the person, pretended they did not see them and drove off straight away. They would not wait. And I was already one meter away from reaching the bus, and it closed the door and drove off. “We are not to blame for that.”

Quotes

The public transport here in the neighbourhood is a bit complicated. The buses do not always arrive on time, and the bus over there is the same thing. For example, during the weekend, if I do not rush myself, I can never catch the bus. It always comes too early, because there are few people. It comes too early and takes off, and I end up missing it. Then, I have to take an Uber or a taxi, or go by bike.

When the pandemic started, “my life stopped, my life stopped, my head felt foggy. Everything was strange to me. I could not see anyone in the street, I could not work, so I would go out, I walked all over, I went to Guincho on foot, I would come and go, come and go. Until the time came when we could not go out during the weekend, we would go spend time in the street until the cops showed up and we would have to go home. Life here in the neighbourhood became very sad. Sad, very sad. The park here used to be full of children during the weekend, and during the pandemic you could not see a single soul.

At the time of the pandemic there were fewer buses, but they still existed. In my case, I always walked. I did everything here. I did not need to take buses or drive.” “My boss lets us leave at 5:30pm, so that we can catch the 5:50pm bus, because we only have another bus an hour later. There should be one more bus per hour, because there are many people coming back from work. During the morning, the buses are full and it is the same during the afternoon. There is no place to sit down. We are all packed like sardines. If there is an accident, we are vulnerable. If there is a sharp turn, we will hurt ourselves.

The kids would stone the bus because the drivers would not open the door. They passed by, saw the person, pretended they did not see them and drove off straight away. They would not wait. And I was already one meter away from reaching the bus, and it closed the door and drove off. “We are not to blame for that.

Keywords

Pandemic, lack of buses, bus timetables, single mother, Uber, taxi, double job.

RL8_PT03, Portugal, Carla got a new job close to home

Narrative



I'm a 47-year-old single mother born in Cape Verde who migrated to Portugal at the age of 21. I work as an education assistant in a kindergarten in a neighbourhood (Cascais) but at the moment I'm on sick leave since August. I have two boys, one aged 17 and the other aged 21. The younger one is a student, and the older one does not work and has recently become a father of a baby boy. I wake up at 6.30 am and take the bus at 7.30. The bus stop is very, very close to my apartment. My working schedule is 8:30-17:30 and it takes me 15 minutes to get to the place of work. I have to take two buses to get there. Sometimes the buses are not punctual and last May I had an altercation with a Brazilian bus driver because I criticised him for being late. He was very, very rude with me and used the F word when talking to me. I know that he was also rude to other passengers. I wrote a letter of complaint to the municipal office and they forwarded it to the bus company. The answer I got was that if he attacked me, I should also attack him. I don't think this is the right way of behaving with passengers. I have the municipal monthly ticket (pass) which is free from cost but it does not include the train travels. It should, at least, include the train ticket to Carcavelos because it's part of the same municipality. Sometimes I can't afford to pay for the train which costs 40 euros per month. The drivers of this bus company do not respect the time schedules because when I go to Parede I have to take three buses and it shouldn't be that way. There should be a direct bus line. This a waste of time and the drivers talk a lot on the phone and are oftentimes late. I know other passengers who also complained because of the drivers' constantly delays. Moreover, the company should increase the frequency of the buses. At the weekend the delays are also frequent. I have already complained to a supervisor about the delays. When I do my shopping in the nearby supermarkets, I also have to wait a lot, it sucks. When it rains, the shelters of the bus stops do not protect from the rain. The bus stop near Cascais Shopping is so windy and the way it is built does not protect the passengers. There should be a glass protecting people from the wind. I don't know what kind of fuel is used in these buses but the fumes don't smell bad. The buses are comfortable inside but some of the passengers do not behave properly. I cannot ride a bike but my younger son has two bikes and he rides a lot with his friends. At the time of the pandemic outbreak I panicked, I stopped watching the news. I was working as a kitchen helper in a kindergarten and I had to stay at home. Then, when we resumed work, everybody in the bus wore a mask but the buses were too full. Then I applied for a position in the kindergarten in this neighbourhood. I didn't need to take the bus anymore but I also kept the other job as cleaner for a family and kept on taking buses to get to places. In this neighbourhood people will continue to use the buses and private cars. There's no way people will ever use bikes because this is a heavy neighbourhood and bikes are stolen, even when they are kept inside the buildings because the entrance doors are often left open. In the future, I think the local authorities should build shelters in the bus stops to protect passengers. Many bus stops only have the pole with the schedule and nothing else.

Quotes

... take a bus, get off at one place, wait for another. For example, if I go to Parede, where I clean the staircase of a building, I take 3 or 4 buses to get there, and that makes no sense, it should be a direct bus. I take bus number 29 to São João, in São João I take bus

number 3 or number 23 and I get off near the beach. From there, I have to wait for bus number 31 towards Carcavelos. I get off in Carcavelos and walk a little and wait for bus number 30. Four buses to reach Parede is a waste of time.

My colleagues and I stayed at home, but I didn't work from home. [when we resumed work] everyone in the bus was wearing a mask, sometimes the bus was so full that you couldn't breathe, one was on top of the other. There are some passengers wear a mask, but when they are inside they take off the mask. If the rule is for everyone, it is for everyone. And those who take off their masks in the bus, should be put out of the bus, they are harming others.

No, the buses don't smell bad. I never noticed that, but I don't know if the fuel is gasoline or diesel, I don't know!

Look, a car comes in handy, when a person is sick, one gets in the car and goes to the hospital, 5 minutes and we are in the hospital. Without a car a person is here dying at home. One calls an ambulance it takes a long time to come. When INEM [NHS's emergency service] arrives it's too late, they take their time.

Biking here is not worth because it's a very heavy neighbourhood, many people steal cars, they steal bicycles and exchange them for drugs. It's not worth it. My son had a bike and it was stolen.

To improve the situation in the future, the local authorities should build proper bus stops. There are many stops that don't have shelters, there's only that sign with the pole and the time schedule and nothing else.

Keywords

Delays, buses, economic hardship, council housing, bad bus circuits, poor bus frequency

RL8_PT04, Portugal, Manuel is concerned by the lack of public transports and also its relation to soft mobility and by public policies that are still benefiting the use of the car

Narrative

I am 49 years old, living in Sintra with my wife and a young daughter, and working at Benfica, which is 25 to 30 minutes commuting using an electric bicycle. I use a bicycle at almost 11 years now, because one time I travel to Barcelona and I use a bicycle there. Then, I thought I can do the same here in Portugal. It took me some time to adapt because I was not so physical and because of the rain, but now I am well adapted. The bicycle is a part of my routine. My routine starts by taking my daughter to school by bicycle. I need to go with her because there are no cycling paths in the way to school and I feel some insecurity for her. Then I go to work and it takes me 25 to 30 minutes. There are no cycling paths as well and I need to cross the city centre of Amadora. My wife works at home (teleworking) but she will change work. She will have to use the car one time a week because there are no adequate public transports from Sintra to Odivelas. It takes too much time. Normally I try to use my bicycle in all the things that I do, including shopping. I rarely use the car. I try to adapt my activities to the use of the bicycle. For instance, my daughter has her swimming lessons in a swimming pool that is at a distance that I can go by bicycle, because if I go by car "I go crazy with the traffic jam". "Decisions already lead us to the automobile. And, people think that there is no other way of thinking. And this is something that takes a little time to change. "I choose the places I go based on the mobility that I can do and that I prefer doing". In relation to the COVID and the mobility it was an opportunity to change the mindset I had to boost sustainable mobility but instead the use of the car has increased. "I know many who used public transport and, with the fear of catching COVID 19, started driving. This in the pandemic. But of course, later, when we went back to work normally, we continued to drive. Now, only with the price of gasoline maybe they think twice again, about taking public transport or not."

Quotes

I choose the places I go based on the mobility that I can do and that I prefer doing.

In order to reduce car use, I think there are two fundamental pillars. One of them is public transport. Without decent public transport, you're not going to see a huge decrease in car use.

How is it possible to shorten the travel time tremendously? Combining bicycle + public transport.

Keywords

Bicycle, electric bicycle, cycling paths, mobility, car dependency, public transport, traffic slowdown

RL8_PT05, Portugal, Public transport is recovering after the pandemic

Narrative

My name is Renato and I am 53 years old. I was born in Lisbon, but my parents came to live in Cascais when I was 6 months old. I am the youngest of seven siblings. They all went their separate ways, and I was the only one who stayed with my mother. I came to live here when I was a small boy and I am still living in Cascais. I only studied up to the second grade. Back in the day, kids just wanted to play and go to the park to see the animals. I liked to hang out on the street, I did not like studying that much. But that is how it was in those days. So, I did not had a proper education.

At the moment, I live by myself. I have no wife, no children. I work in an association. "I give food to people in need, namely fresh and frozen food. This is what I do at the moment. In the past, I did house cleaning for people in need and I used to help dispose of furniture. So, I used to do that. Now, I can no longer do that. Because of my illness, I cannot venture out much now. Now, I am only helping with food distribution." Right now, I am on sick leave. I had a cardiac arrest and now I am on sick leave. I have been on sick leave for about five and a half months now. I hope to be back to work next year. I have always worked in Cascais. I worked in other places too. But when my mother died, everything changed. I really went downhill. My mother died in 2004 and my brother threw me out. He said that I could not live there anymore, so he threw me out. I lived for 10 years on the street and the ladies from Social Security found me. I was sleeping in the woods, and they said they would help me and I accepted their help. They believed in me, and it is because of them that I am working here. I really asked them to help me, because I could not bear it anymore. I was given a house in 2015 in Abóboda, but it was too far for me to come here. I liked it there because the house was bigger. But now they moved me here to this neighbourhood. My workplace is right next door. At the moment, I need to leave the neighbourhood more often. I am going to Lisbon three times a week: Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I go there because I am undergoing treatment for my heart.

When I go shopping, I carry my own backpack. I put everything in my backpack. It is better than having bags in my hand.

I do not need to carry many groceries, because I live alone. I just buy what is necessary. That is when I leave my neighbourhood. But I do not have to shop everyday. There is a supermarket here, everyone goes there. Now, another one has opened nearby. The bus passes there, people get off and go to the supermarket. Sometimes, I also go there, but I walk, I do not take the bus in this case. The neighbourhood, in terms of transport, is good: "I have public transport close to my house. I have transport near my house, there is a bus stop. I take the bus here and I go to Cascais. And down there, you can find everything. It is good." In terms of schedules, the bus comes every hour. It is good for me. Tomorrow I am having a heart scan and I have to depart at 7am. I am doing

this scan in Santa Cruz, so I have to take the bus. “I take the bus here to Cascais, then from there I take the train to Algés. Then, in Algés I take the bus to the clinic. When there is a lot of traffic, it is different, because the buses take a long time to get here. We have to wait. No, but it is fast, it is fast.” I have one public transport pass for the municipality of Cascais and another one for the train and for the buses outside Cascais. This second one costs 40 euros. The public transport pass for Cascais “is free, I did not pay anything. I paid the initial 7 euros to get the card, and then on I did not pay anything else. But the second one, I have to pay monthly.

It is the train pass, because I take the train.” “The transport situation is good for me. I leave the neighbourhood and I get where I want to be quickly. I can get back to my neighbourhood, which was impossible before. In the old days, people started throwing stones at the buses. The buses were prohibited from entering the neighbourhood, but that has changed. Now the buses have come back. And it is good for the old people. Now, they have vaccination centre here and people come straight to this place. Many people get the bus now here. For me, it is good, it is a joyful ride.” When there the pandemic started, I got COVID. It was a bit difficult for me. I was the first one to catch it in my work, it was me. “I went home straight away, when I caught it I went home straight away. My colleagues were not infected, I was the only one. And, ok, I put my face in front of people. I was the one who would open the door and close it. I talked to people. You see, without a mask or anything, you get infected and I got infected. I was sick for 14 days, and I stayed at home for 14 days. My throat hurt, my back hurt, my head hurt, and I did not know what to do. But, you know, I recovered and I had the strength to endure it.” I recovered and then I went back to work again. I was better. I re-did the test and it was negative. I went back to work. But I became sick, I caught COVID for a second time, another 14 days at home. But then my colleagues were infected too. It was not my fault, they just caught COVID too. And I left again, I went home straight away. I came back and caught it again and then in July I went back to work again, until I had a cardiac arrest. Just like that. “From then on, my life...I had COVID, it was a bit difficult, the transport and everything. It was a bit too much with the masks. People were always saying to put the mask on. You could not be anywhere without a mask. If you went to a shopping centre, you had to wear a mask.

If you went to the supermarket, you also had to wear one. So, that is all over now. It is all over for me. About six months ago, or seven or eight months ago, I do not know, you do not have to wear a mask on the bus anymore. I think that is bad. In public transports, we should use it, I think.” The transport during the pandemic, it was a struggle. With so many people on the bus, everyone had to wear a mask. You could not get on the bus if you did not have a mask on. The driver would not let you in and that was it. ‘You do not have a mask, you cannot come.’ And it happened to me too, I forgot my mask. ‘You do not get in, get a mask if you have one.’ It was complicated, very complicated. Now, I am not afraid. If get COVID again, well, I am going home. My perception is that people here use more public transport now. But not during the pandemic, they all drove their cars during that time. People who had a car would leave the neighbourhood, whoever did would stay there. But I did not change my transport habits after COVID. “I stayed the same all the time. It is the same for me. During the pandemic, I could not go out anywhere. I could not do anything, and I had to call my colleagues for them to come and get me something. And I would always ask my neighbour: ‘could you go and get me that, I cannot leave the

house.’ It was a bit complicated for me, when I could not leave the house, but my neighbour would help.” But other than that, I did not change my habits.

In fact, I used to walk more in the old days, because the buses did not pass here in the old days. Now that the City Hall has organised the transports quite well, it is good for the elderly to get around. This way, they do not have to walk to a distant bus stop or call a taxi. It is good for the older people.

I used to walk more when I was younger. When I was younger I was crazy about it. Not now, not for my age. I like to walk more. I know how to ride a bicycle, but I do not have one. When I was young, I used to cycle a lot. I went everywhere with my bicycle. Not anymore, now I walk. If I feel like it, I walk, if I do not feel like it, I stay at home. I get on public transport so I do not get so tired, because I cannot get tired. Now, in the old days we had all the energy, now we do not have any energy because of our age. There are public scooters there too. But that is more for young people. There is also a skate park here, which is for kids. They have already held a competition there. I do not go there, I do not like it very much. Taxis are not worth talking about. I do not take taxis. Now there is even Uber. For the future, I want transport to be better. For me, there should be more public transport in here, more routes for people to take.

Quotes

I give food to people in need, namely fresh and frozen food. This is what I do at the moment. In the past, I did house cleaning for people in need and I used to help dispose of furniture. So, I used to do that. Now, I can no longer do that. Because of my illness, I cannot venture out much now. Now, I am only helping with food distribution.

I take the bus here to Cascais, then from there I take the train to Algés. Then, in Algés I take the bus to the clinic. When there is a lot of traffic, it is different, because the buses take a long time to get here. We have to wait. No, but it is fast, it is fast.

The transport situation is good for me. I leave the neighbourhood and I get where I want to be quickly. I can get back to my neighbourhood, which was impossible before. In the old days, people started throwing stones at the buses. The buses were prohibited from entering the neighbourhood, but that has changed. Now the buses have come back. And it is good for the old people. Now, they have vaccination centre here and people come straight to this place. Many people get the bus now here. For me, it is good, it is a joyful ride.

From then on, my life...I had COVID, it was a bit difficult, the transport and everything. It was a bit too much with the masks. People were always saying to put the mask on. You could not be anywhere without a mask. If you went to a shopping centre, you had to wear a mask. If you went to the supermarket, you also had to wear one. So, that is all over now. It is all over for me. About six months ago, or seven or eight months ago, I do not know, you do not have to wear a mask on the bus anymore. I think that is bad. In public transports, we should use it, I think.

Keywords

Shopping, access to health, public transport, neighbourhood change, transport policy, homelessness, charity, sick leave

RL8_PT06, Portugal, Daily bike trains to school were the triggering event

Narrative

My name is Alexandre, I am married, and I am 40 years old. I was born in Porto and I have been living in Lisbon for some years now. I work in technology. I have two daughters. One is 8 years old and the other is 3 years old. As a child, while living in Porto, I used to cycle until I was 16. I cycled a lot and I even went to school by bike a lot. The school was very close, and I would normally walk there, but I would also cycle a lot with my friends. Then, I bought a motorbike at the age of 16, so the bicycle became less important for me. I am a sportsman and I like physical activity very much. I have always done physical exercise, namely running, playing football, and going for walks. My daughter who is 6 years old is also encouraged by us to do exercise. We walk a lot and she also keeps me company by running. I have also been very concerned about ecology from a very young age. I have environmental concerns and I always wanted to give my children a new vision of how to get around. It is very different going to school by car, instead of walking, for example. If they walk or cycle, they see things differently. “We bet a lot on the education of the children. We want them to know about the different paths they can choose. We advocate a lot of sustainability, sharing, it is something.... that even gives us pleasure...” With the outbreak of the pandemic, I thought of buying a bicycle so that I could move around. I have to use a car for my work. So, I bought a bicycle to spend some time and I started to move around by bicycle. When I was dropping my daughter off at school, I would always see a group of bicycles and it made me wonder why I was always stuck in traffic. Then, one day, I remembered to go by bike to pick up my daughter from school and I took her bike too. We both went home by bike. We go from Ajuda to Restelo. It is still about 15 or 20 minutes. We did this once or twice, and in the meantime we met the other participants of the Restelo bicycle train. It was at that time that this change to using a bicycle began. But we do not only cycle, we also walk with the children to school several times a week. I think we have started to develop a new kind of mobility. My daughter, who is now 8 years old, goes to school on her bicycle, and because we offer alternatives to the car, she is already looking at mobility in a different way. Our youngest daughter also goes with us. We use a smaller car seat to transport her. This change is not exactly related to the outbreak of the pandemic, because if I had met these colleagues

from the bicycle group before, I think I would have started then. Even at my work, we were already teleworking and video conferencing before the pandemic. So, I did not feel affected. The only difference I felt was that I travelled less often. We do face-to-face meetings less and less. We are all used to working remotely by now. When we see that there is a need to maintain face-to-face contact, maybe we try to have that, but we are working remotely more and more. As for my commute, I wake up around 7am and leave around 8am. We get on our bicycles and take the children to school, which is in Restelo. We often ride together on the bicycle train. We meet up with other people along the way and the bike train gets bigger with more children. After dropping my daughter off at school, I return to the Ajuda area to bring my youngest daughter to school too. Then, I cycle to the docks area where our office is. This office was chosen so that I could keep this green mobility. I could have some benefits from having an office in a more central part of town. It would be easier for me to commute and be with clients. Here, I sometimes have to use the car, but I rarely do. Then, at the end of the day, I go back to the Restelo area to pick up my eldest daughter. I go home, leave my bicycle there, and pick up my youngest daughter on foot. Regarding shopping, we choose to buy locally. We live in an area where there is a lot of retail. Sometimes we go to a bigger supermarket because it is relatively close, but traditionally we try to shop locally, right there on our street. When we need to buy a larger quantity of products, or heavier products, we use the car. During the weekend, we use the bicycle to go out, or to go to a museum, or to take the children for a ride by the river. In the past, we used to walk more. Today, we cycle more often. The four of us go on bike picnics. We use the bicycle a lot more now. But it is not possible to do everything by bicycle or on foot. My wife has to take our eldest daughter to other places. For that reason and others, we still keep the car with us. For example, if it is raining a lot, we use the car to take the children. I think cycling has many advantages and is very beneficial in many ways. Cycling becomes a faster way of getting around for me. Riding a bicycle is also more enjoyable, in my opinion. Furthermore, cycling is more economical. "If I can, I will try to reduce our ecological footprint. Nowadays, I think a lot before I use the car to commute." Regarding the pandemic, we spent more time at home during the lockdown. We were working more at home, and we did not commute by car as much. I was working in the city centre at the time, and I was driving every day. As I stopped commuting, I started to have other experiences. On the one hand, not being in traffic was a very good thing: "The truth is that today I have much less patience when I have to get in the car. For example, it is much more difficult to know that I have to go to a certain place by car, I know I am not going to like it. It is true that the pandemic has changed our way of seeing things a little bit. I am a big believer that our experiences will lead us to make different decisions, it is true." "If I have to move to another office, I will try to stick with the possibility of using bicycle, it will be a condition." Regarding aspects to be improved, perhaps public transport could be better in terms of supply. Just yesterday we took the tram to Alcântara, and went to the library with the children, and then we waited almost 40 minutes for the tram back. We gave up waiting for the tram. We caught another tram, and then we walked home. So, if public transport were more efficient, maybe people would use it more. If transport was free, cleaner and more frequent, maybe people would use it more.

Quotes



We bet a lot on the education of the children. We want them to know about the different paths they can choose. We advocate a lot of sustainability, sharing, it is something.... that even gives us pleasure...

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If I have to move to another office, I will try to stick with the possibility of using bicycle, it will be a condition.

Keywords

Bicycle, children, ecological footprint, sustainability, walking, environment, pandemic, environmental education

RL8_PT07, Portugal, A much more economical way of moving around

Narrative

My name is Anita and I am 53 years old. I live in Oeiras. I am divorced but I currently have a boyfriend. My daughters no longer live with me. I work in São Domingos de Benfica (Lisbon). I use a bicycle for my commuting because there is a cycle lane that goes from Algés to Caxias. I cycle a daily route of 18km on my way back, and 16km on my way forth, and this takes me about one hour. One third of the route is on a road with car traffic, but that road always has at least 2 lanes. This means that overtaking is easy, which is important for my safety. "I am sure that if I lived in Paço de Arcos, which is the town in the vicinity, the decision would probably not be the same. I am a "duck" as the others say. All you have to do is create infrastructure and the users show up. There has been infrastructure to my house for a long time and I took advantage of it." I do not know exactly when I started using a bicycle, but it was mainly because of an accident I had with my car. I got a problem with my knee because of that and had to have surgery. According to my doctor, I would have to cycle a lot for my knee to recover. I started by using a static

bicycle, but I found it very boring. So, I thought I should get a real bike. “As soon as the knee got good enough for me to cycle safely in the street, I went back to the bike I had not picked up since I was a kid.” The last knee surgery was ten years ago, so this all started then. When I started using the bike to recover from my knee, I then thought maybe I should use the bike as a mode of transport to get around. It started to make a lot of sense to me. Not only because of my knee, but also for environmental and financial reasons. “It is impressive how much we can save by using a bicycle.” However, at the beginning of the process, I only saw adversities when I had to go up the streets and go through traffic. I feared cars. And I would get too much wind. The bike I bought was very big. I still have it, but then I bought a smaller and lighter one. The first big difficulty I came across was that sometimes the lifts were not working. When I had to catch the metro in Terreiro do Paço or Marquês de Pombal, that was difficult. Transporting the bicycle inside the metro was also very difficult because the metro was very crowded with people. So, this part was very difficult for me. Sometimes people had to help me carry my bike up the stairs. That is how I discovered “Bike Buddy” and some Facebook groups dedicated to these causes. Although I had no idea who these people were, about one thousand people gave me a huge energy not to give up and keep going. With “Bike Buddy”, I started to understand and get help to find out the best paths to follow with my bike. I asked them for advice and they answered me, giving me lots of options of paths I could take. So, I started to take a path where I would catch the train in Alcântara and go to Sete Rios. I ended up meeting one of the people from “Bike Buddy” who was also doing this path and had given me some advice. I met this person, and then another one, and we did this path a lot of times together. We were always chatting, it was really fun. We would go our own ways here in the Colombo Shopping Mall. He would go straight on to the “Polis”, and then I would come to work. That was the first phase. Then, the incentive from the City Hall to buy an electric bicycle was created and this activity grew over the years. All the cycling infrastructures in the city grew, although I was already using them. “I still do not go to certain places, but after the purchase of the electric bike, I decided to sell my car. I took the decision of not having a car and to only have the bike as a means of transport three years ago.” Obviously, there are things I regret sometimes when I remember I have sold my car. “For instance, when I go shopping, it is very complicated because of the bicycle I decided to have. The bike I have is made to be folded up and taken with us everywhere. There are times when I would prefer not to ride it. So, there are times when having a bike also changed my behaviour a little bit, as the space for baggage is not very big for me to go to the supermarket. So, for me, going to the supermarket can be dramatic.” “One of the reasons I gave up my car was because it was just me who did not have a car. Everybody does. My daughters who used to live with me had a car. However, they do not live with me anymore. But the point is: it was relatively easy to borrow a car if I needed one and it is cheaper to use a taxi, Uber or public transport than to maintain the cost of a car permanently.” So, if my daughters do not want to give up their car, it is their problem. The cost is all theirs, obviously the responsibility is all theirs as well. I have the advantage of being able to borrow a car, but it is not just from them. All my friends have a car, and they will also lend me a car if I want. My boyfriend also goes shopping with me and helps me to take the grocery bags home. So, we have things organised this way, we go shopping and end up doing the shopping for his house and the shopping for my house. There are other situations where I sometimes need the car. I have an aunt, Carmo, who lives in a very high area with a horrible road surface on a very narrow road. I confess that I do not like

going there by bike very much. Sometimes, I drive there with my boyfriend, but I do not do that every day. There is also another situation in which I prefer to use a car, which is when I go to the shopping centre. I went back to the Colombo Shopping Centre last week for the first time since the pandemic started. Although the bicycle folds up kind of like a pram, it is still complicated to carry it inside the mall. Walking around people is not easy. I normally go there in a hurry. If I go there, it is because I have something to do. It is not to walk around and I notice that it is complicated. “This bike has been to the cinema, to the theatre and to museums. It is a very cultured bike. It has been in the cinema, but it is usually stored in the box office. But nobody really gets upset because it folds up and becomes the size of a suitcase. I usually use this analogy: ‘I am bringing a suitcase, isn’t there a place where I can keep it?’, and people make a very wry smile. (...) If I arrive with my bicycle whole and open, they immediately say I cannot go in, but if I fold it, they say ok. Ah, and at the hospital people also laugh every time I go for consultations. The bicycle always goes folded with me.” So, a normal commuting day goes like this. I leave home at 8:15am to get to work at 9:30am. My commute is about 1 hour, so I take my time, some days I come faster, some days slower. “Sometimes I stay at my boyfriend’s house here in Saldanha, and then the commute takes 25 minutes. But it is much slower because there are lots of traffic lights, and the whole route is done on a cycle lane essentially. Given that there are already so many bicycles in Lisbon, I find it much more peaceful to use a bike here than in Oeiras. ”Then, sometimes I also use my bicycle during lunchtime. For instance, to exercise. I do my workouts over there on the park in the open air. I change clothes here, and I go there with my bicycle to do my strength exercises. Then, I come back. Afterwards, at the end of the day, I leave and I do whatever I have to do. Okay, sometimes I go dancing, then eventually I come home very late. I go everywhere by bike. People ask: “Ah, aren’t you afraid?” and, to date, nothing has ever happened to me. Yes, I go all by myself by the waterfront normally, at 3am/4am if I have to. During the weekend, you hardly see any bikes. I usually move to Saldanha (Lisbon) for the weekend and in Saldanha you have what they call the “15-minute city”. Nobody uses a car, nobody needs a car for anything. You do not need a bicycle either. To go shopping, to go the pharmacy, to the cinema, to go out to dinner, you do not need a car. But, meanwhile, I managed to leave my other bicycle – the bigger one – in Saldanha at my boyfriend’s house, in case I need it. I left that bike there for my boyfriend and sometimes we both use it. The last ride we took to Campo Grande, we had brunch in a garden at the kiosk and then we went to the Bordalo Pinheiro Museum, because it was one more of those things I wanted to do. At this museum, we did not have to fold the bike, because they have an informal park for the bikes inside. When we both go, his bicycle has a lock and I can attach mine to his. One thing I learned from buying this bike. With the other cheaper bicycles, if they were stolen I could buy another one. But this one was a significant investment, so I cannot be that relaxed anymore. The bike was 3400 euros. “With the pandemic, I notice a lot more bicycles in the city, but my travels into the city centre are quite recent and that is because my boyfriend lives here in Lisbon. Between Avenida da República and Duque de Ávila, which is just the intersection with the most bike traffic in the city, I love it. I love it when there is volume. I love it when there are children and little chairs. In fact, I am already thinking about the bicycle I will have when I am a grandmother.” I notice an increasing number of bicycles in the city. “I already used a bicycle before the pandemic and I have kept everything the same. ”The fact we could ride without a mask. The bicycle was the only one that allowed me to ride outdoors without a mask, and my commute is 1 hour

there and 1 hour back. It is a good aspect of cycling. I love it when it is cold and to feel that freezing air, but not feeling cold myself.” Among the people I know, there are people who use bicycles. They live in the city centre and use mostly “Giras” [municipal shared bikes]. But they have to live within the network of the “Gira”. In my family, I only managed to recruit one daughter to use the bicycle and that also only happened in a specific situation during COVID. I think it was more due to my influence and the path she was on. She worked at TAP. The flight attendants carry a huge load, they always carry at least two suitcases: a hand luggage and a check-in bag. Also, the working hours are not very flexible, so I do not think it is very practical. Meanwhile, my daughter became unemployed and got a job as a tour guide and had to take the minibus that she drove with the tourists in Cruz Quebrada. So, from Caxias to Cruz Quebrada is very close and she used to use the bicycle as a means of transport. She started work very early, but later the work schedules changed. Her path was about 3km. I do 18km. I know few people who do as many kilometres as I do. “But interestingly the other day I had to take the car and it took me exactly 1 hour from home to here. I know it is not normal. It is not usual, but it happened. It did not pay off in terms of time.” Regarding aspects to be improved, I would like there to be more bicycle lanes. “When I am not on a cycle lane, I know that I have to keep my senses alert and that I cannot be too careful.” “I believe I pedal for a better world and I think I am being harmed. When there is too much humidity in the air, I feel the exhaust fumes. And sometimes I feel like holding my breath to safeguard myself. Now, during these last two weeks, which have been very humid, I have felt it a lot! I am feeling the pollution.” In the Oeiras municipality, there is no parking or speed control whatsoever. There are not enough policemen, not enough means to deal with things, because when you make a complaint, it goes nowhere. I was run over at the entrance to the waterfront promenade. Cars are not allowed there, except for loading and unloading at the restaurant, but everybody parks there because it is open. This summer I decided to count the cars, and there were 62 cars there. So, we need inspection. We need more cycle lanes. I do not know what can be done about pollution, but people could do as I did and leave the car at home and stop polluting.

Quotes

I am sure that if I lived in Paço de Arcos, which is the town in the vicinity, the decision would probably not be the same. I am a “duck” as the others say. All you have to do is create infrastructure and the users show up. There has been infrastructure to my house for a long time and I took advantage of it.

It is impressive how much we can save by using a bicycle.

I still do not go to certain places, but after the purchase of the electric bike, I decided to sell my car. I took the decision of not having a car and to only have the bike as a means of transport three years ago.

For instance, when I go shopping, it is very complicated because of the bicycle I decided to have. The bike I have is made to be folded up and taken with us everywhere. There are times when I would prefer not to ride it. So, there are times when having a bike also

changed my behaviour a little bit, as the space for baggage is not very big for me to go to the supermarket. So, for me, going to the supermarket can be dramatic.

One of the reasons I gave up my car was because it was just me who did not have a car. Everybody does. My daughters who used to live with me had a car. However, they do not live with me anymore. But the point is: it was relatively easy to borrow a car if I needed one and it is cheaper to use a taxi, Uber or public transport than to maintain the cost of a car permanently.

I already used a bicycle before the pandemic and I have kept everything the same.

The fact we could ride without a mask. The bicycle was the only one that allowed me to ride outdoors without a mask, and my commute is 1 hour there and 1 hour back. It is a good aspect of cycling. I love it when it is cold and to feel that freezing air, but not feeling cold myself.

Keywords

Bicycle, Bike Buddies initiative, Facebook groups, social network, pandemic, no car, cycle lanes, security on road, best paths to cycle, infrastructures, speed, pollution.

RL8_PT08, Portugal, The pandemic situation was the final push to cycling

Narrative

I'm a 41-year-old mother of 4 children aged between 3 and 11. Presently, I'm a full-time mother and housewife. I was born in Lisbon and when I was 12, I went with my parents to Macao. I returned in 1999. My husband is a medical doctor and works in two nearby hospitals. My eldest child has a serious health condition and we have often been abroad with him in order to get special medical treatment for his condition. The four children have different food allergies and I order food from particular producers and receive the baskets at home. I also order the other products from supermarkets, thus, I don't have to carry heavy shopping bags. My husband is very interested in technology and imported a very sophisticated electric bike in 2019. He rides it to the hospitals even when doing night shifts and no matter what the weather looks like. He has a folding bicycle, so he can take it with him to the places where he works. I got my imported electric bike as a present from my husband in October 2020 because during the pandemic of Covid-19, I was really tired of walking the 4 children to school. Avoiding the public transports for fear of contamination,

we all went on foot. Presently, the two older children ride their bikes to school and the two younger ones go on my bike. It has been adapted in order to sit them safely like a rail around the children's seats. We have appropriate clothes for rainy weather and it takes us maximum 20 minutes to cycle from home to the school/kindergarten. Although, we have a car I don't like driving. We only use the car when we go on holidays and as soon as we get to our destination, we park it and prefer to walk. We don't take our bikes when on holidays because there's no room in the car. If I have to go to the city centre, I take a uber or a taxi. We have lots of transports around us: the bus, the tram, the train and the boat. Madalena is aware that parking the bike at home is a major obstacle for people to adopt cycling as a way of transport. She says they are fortunate because there's plenty of room in the building's hall and the neighbours don't mind with so many bikes there. We were aware of financial support to buy bicycles but my husband's bike and mine were not eligible for benefitting from that support. One of Madalena's main concerns is security for cyclists because in the area where the family lives there are no bike lanes. Although she tells her children that this is not the right behaviour, they cycle on the sidewalk of a major avenue, with very few pedestrians, to get to school. She would like to have solar panels to recharge the batteries, but living in a historical neighbourhood that's not allowed. She is very much aware that one of the main obstacles for people to adopt cycling as a way of transport is the lack of storage in most buildings and workplaces, and also sheds on the streets to leave the bikes protected from the rain. For the future she claims for more rules for those using e-scooters and cyclists like the mandatory wearing of a helmet. She claims for more cycling lanes but not pop-up bike lanes. She also believes that children should receive formal education about traffic rules earlier in life. She is noticing that people who adopted cycling during the pandemic period, like other parents who have their children in the same school, are going back to driving cars and that's a pity. There should be more incentives for people giving up on using the car on a daily basis.

Quotes

I don't need gas, I'm not polluting. Obviously there is an ecological footprint, I hope, lighter than if I used the car, but I only recharge the bike once a week. My energy consumption is less than 10 euros per month. For the journey that I make, I feel happy to contribute in this way, that is, not to be polluting, not to be wasting gasoline. And besides, a person is happier when pedalling.

There is no secure parking for bicycles, not only to prevent them from being stolen during the night or during the day, but also to keep them protected from the weather, the rain, the heat.

The pandemic came to give the final push [for me to adopt the bicycle as a means of transport], but my husband already had that idea [of offering me the bicycle]

I can't solve the battery charging problem. I am not allowed to have solar panels on the roof because we are in a historic area. Our aim was to make this building independent and sustainable. We have a well outside, we bring water, we have a lot of sun exposure and we wanted to make the building self-sustainable.

Keywords

Bike lanes; sustainability; children; cycling; incentives; cleaner world # RL8_PT09, Portugal, The dream of a more cycle-friendly city

RL8_PT09 - The dream of a more cycle friendly city

Narrative

I am Sebastião, I am 49 years old. I was born in Mozambique and migrated to Portugal, with my grandparents, in 1976 when Mozambique became an independent country . Since I was five years old I have lived in Setúbal. I've been a primary school teacher for more than 20 years and I live with my wife and two children. When I was young I had a bike, even competing in B-cross races (BMX). Since 2015, I have been commuting by bicycle. I had a light commercial diesel vehicle, as I had to transport instruments from my other job as a musician. When my first child was born, I bought a passenger car. In the meantime I found information on the net regarding the use of the bicycle as an everyday transport mode and decided to use the bike everyday. Then, I bought my bicycle and put a little chair to transport my son. However, at the beginning I did not use it to transport my son to the kindergarten. I took my son to school by car, returned home, got on my bicycle and went to work in a nearby school. In the afternoon, if my wife did not go to pick up our son, I would return home on my bike, leave it at home, in the fourth floor, and take my car to go and fetch my son.

In the meantime, at an event in Lisbon I tried out a new cargo bike, and realised that this bike would solve my last restrictions to take the kid to school. In late 2019, I decided to sell my car, fortunately just before the pandemic. With the new e-bike I can carry my two children and the necessary load. At the same time, I adapted it to transport my children when raining and with wind protection. I bought the e-bike and I received a small financial support from the Government, nearly 10% of the total cost. It is an investment, but with the bike I can save money comparatively to the cost of having a car. Today I use the bike for my everyday trips.

I get the permission from my neighbours to park the bike in the building's ground level, and now I don't have to take it to my apartment. Everyday, I check the weather report for the next day and according to that I prepare my bike and my kids' clothing. I take my children to school and I go to work. In the afternoon I pick one of my children, whereas my wife drives to pick up the other one. We still have a car in our household, but we try to use it less and even during the holidays we choose the train to travel. We travel with the bikes and the "marriage" of bike and train is perfect. However, for some trips we still have to use the car, for longer trips or to places without bike lanes. In our municipality

the infrastructure for the use of bicycles lacks benefits and planning. There are cycling paths that end without continuity and sharing the roads with cars and pedestrian is oftentimes dangerous. For me it is more comfortable to go to the cinema in Lisbon, using the bike, train and boat and then by bike to the cinema at the nearest mall, due to the lack of security to use the bike. Another example is travelling to a large park in Moita and another one in Lisbon. In the first case, Parque José Afonso, I can't cycle safely with my children, whereas I can go to Parque das Nações in Lisbon, on the other side of Tagus river. The main problems that I can point out are the bike lanes connections in the municipality and the connections to other municipalities. On the other hand, the location of the train station is away from the centre of Moita and the bus service still has some problems due the supply capacity at peak hours. Related to post Covid, I don't feel much more different, except in the increase of use of public space, namely by children and their parents. In relation to modal split, generally speaking, people returned to the use of cars. In my case, I still use my bike, despite the image that cycling is for kids or the poor people. The use and abuse of the public space by drivers is resumed and the urban design does not help either. Sidewalks are narrow, the zebra crossings should be elevated and the public transport should be privileged, namely by the installation of BUS lanes and the extension of the tram line. On the other hand, the use of electric cars could reduction the gas emissions, but not the use os public space. The municipality could improve the use of bikes for the daily commuting of local civil servants when in service. The main obstacle, I think is the cultural one. The European fundings should be used on mobility transition.

I hope that me and our sons could drive and walk safely in contact with nature, seeing and hearing the birds singing and smelling the aroma that we cannot be felt through the window of a car. However, I am afraid that this may not be achieved mainly due to political inability.

Quotes

What would I change in the future? There could be more electric cars, although this is not the solution, because if everyone has their own electric car, mobility problems will continue. It's not the type of fuel, it's not the type of energy that cars run on that will change the situation.

Keywords

Public space; bicycles; public transport; bike friendly cities; bike lanes; modal transfer

RL8_PT10, Portugal, Fernanda wishes she could prompt the change towards cycling faster than she is able

Narrative

I am a 45-year-old mother of 4 children. They are aged between 22 and 4. The youngest ones are twins and the boy is autistic. I am married. I was born and brought up in Lisbon, quite close from where I live now. I am from an upper-middle class and both my parents had higher education degrees. I attended school in a private school not far from here. My parents had a car and everywhere we went we went by car. I cannot recall going anywhere on foot. I did not know the neighbourhood where I lived till the age of 21. I went to school in the school bus. I seldom walked or used public transports and I now realise that I did not know the city. When I started to be independent, I also moved around by car taking my daughter, who is now 22, to school also in Lisbon. Now that I move around by bike or on foot I feel that I know the neighbourhood, I know the people who live here and there's a feeling of knowing each other, on the contrary to what many people think because this is a recently built area. It's like a modern village with a strong sense of community. I lived in another neighbourhood in Lisbon but I did not even know my neighbours because I drove directly out of the garage. There was no sense of community and I do not feel attached to this neighbourhood even though I lived there for 9 years [1997-2006]. During the Summer holidays I went to the countryside and there I had a bike. I saw the bike as an instrument for leisure and during adolescence I did not ride it. When I was a kid no one used bicycles in Lisbon. When I moved to Parque das Nações in 2006, I started to use public transports and to walk to take my eldest daughter to school. I only started to use public transports when I was 34. My husband had a VW Golf and I drove a Smart which was a very small car to take kids to school. My husband had an accident in which his car was destroyed and he used mine. Then we decided to sell the Smart because I was able to manage my life with bus and metro. When we needed a car we asked my mother's. My bother used to drive because he had kids but he was getting stressed when taking the kids to the kindergarten. He had had a motorbike and had visited countries where parents take the kids to school by bicycle. Thus, he decided to buy a bicycle to transport his children and influenced me decisively. It took me more than one year to change my opinion and to adopt the bike to go to my place of work

Quotes

I understand that people use the car in town because I was like that too. I would like people to change like I changed, but I understand that they don't change because there have to be certain key moments and if those moments don't happen it will be very difficult.

I'm sure many people thought I was stupid putting my children in danger by taking them on my bike in the middle of cars, but whether they thought it was horrible, whether they thought it was wonderful, they respected it more than when I cycled alone because they would not be held responsible for an accident.

Sometimes I think about what I can do to make people change because I used to be like that too [car dependent]. When I explain to people how I do it, many say "oh, that doesn't work for me. I'm afraid. I get sweaty. What about the weight?"

There's a big focus on demonizing e-scooters, and I'm not an e-scooter user, but they're great means for very short distances, especially when the ground is good, but there's not much place to put them. In the future there will have to parking places to park them at the expense of car parking.

Keywords

Electric cargo-bike; change; children; economical choice; pollution; short-distance transport efficiency; e-scooters

RL8_IT01, Italy, Roberta, a young disabled woman is torn between sustainable transport, time and inclusive public transport

Narrative

My name is Roberta, I am 26 years old and I have lived in the city for 21 years. I live in a semi-peripheral neighbourhood with my parents and my brother, who was adopted together with me.

The area is well connected because it is close to the three metro lines that take us to the centre, but there are a lot of inconveniences. For my work as a wedding and event organiser and as a photographer, I have always moved from one part of the city to another by public transport because I don't have a car. However, as I always have a very tight schedule, it's very complicated because it takes me twice as long as going by car. Buses run very little and there are many strikes a month. This affects work because sometimes I have to postpone or cancel appointments. But in the last few years, with the new metro line, my commute has speeded up a bit, even though my season ticket has increased.

Lately, I have been moving around in a car with someone because I can no longer move around on my own for long periods of time with public transport. Since September last year, overnight, after an operation for a spinal cord inflammation problem, I lost feeling in my legs and could no longer stand. I spent eight months in wheelchairs and it's been four months since I've been on my feet again. It's only been a month since they gave me permission to take public transport again, but I can only take it if I have to make short journeys nearby. I started taking the metro again a week ago and I still have difficulty with the stairs, but for my job it was essential to be independent again because when my mother drives me, my grandmother has to come too as she can't stay home alone. The

last straw was that on the day I was able to get back on the metro, there was a strike! For a long time, I was stuck at home because I didn't have a lift, and now I really see the difference between being a disabled person or not. I also realised how public transport is not inclusive. The first problem is the mindset of those who work on public transport. They don't train them in these kinds of realities: they don't know how to behave or they don't open the platforms for disabled people on rainy days. In addition, the platforms often don't work, nor do the lifts in the metro. Either you move with someone or you don't move at all. Besides, for me going with someone in the car was salvation because I could do more things in less time, both for work and leisure. Unfortunately, I don't have a driving licence because it's hard for me to get one with dyslexia, but I'd like to be more independent and help the family with commuting, including my grandmother. Today my family continues to accompany me because they don't feel safe. Instead, I've noticed that the train is an easier mode of transport. In the spring I went to another city in a wheelchair and it was no problem at all.

Particularly in the evenings, I prefer to go by car for fear of encountering harassing people. It often happens that people annoy me on the street by making the usual stereotypical connection: black girl equals street worker. Police checks also increase against me and this makes me feel very uncomfortable. During the day, I can manage, but when it's dark I feel more comfortable being picked up by car. There is also a problem with street lighting and many areas I avoid at night. Also with regard to carpooling, I feel unsafe: I would only use it with someone else because I would be afraid to go alone with strangers.

I would love to travel by bike but the infrastructure in the city is too poor and the traffic doesn't allow you to cycle safely. Maybe it would be possible in smaller places. Here, I don't feel comfortable because of the problem of roads that are not well maintained. Getting around by bike would be my dream, both because I could do sport and to avoid pollution. Even if I had a licence and a car, I would do 50/50 with the bike. But if it were still up to me, I would replace all polluting means of transport with environmentally friendly ones and do as in other European countries where there are many more possibilities for cycling. Currently, I would take more public transport if there was more awareness among transport personnel about the inconveniences of people with disabilities. This would be more pleasant: you can't take away what you have but someone would be able to help you get around in your city.

The experience of the lockdown has changed each of us differently in our outlook on transport, but in terms of mobility the situation is still the same and most people still take the car because of the long commute and now even more so because of the fear of crowding on transport. Most of my friends and family members have cars and in my family for example we have two cars: one for my brother and one for me, my mother and my grandmother. I don't have much hope for the near future, I think it will take many years to change this situation and I see that the younger generations are unwilling to change. If everyone did something, a big voice would reach the state, which would perhaps begin to change its approach. I am sensitive to environmental issues and I inform myself daily on the internet. Ever since I was a child, I've been curious about transport and how to get to school faster. In general, I love to move around on public transport, even around Italy, because I have a photographic memory and I like to relax and enjoy what's outside and sometimes chat with other passengers.

Quotes

If I used to complain about public transport, I now realise that being disabled and using transport is a world of its own”.

In the car, I feel safer, especially at night. In the past, I have experienced people following me and the trauma has stayed with me a bit.

If it were up to me I would go around by bike but in this city, you can't because there are too many roots and potholes in the road and too many cars”.

Keywords

Disability, pursuit of independence, climate change awareness, stereotypes, feeling unsafe

RL8_IT02, Italy, Giulia would like a more ecological, inclusive and accessible transport for all

Narrative

My name is Giulia, I am 36 years old and I live in a peripheral area of the city with my husband. I am a deaf person from birth with many years of speech therapy behind me. The choice to live here was made when I was little by my parents to get closer to the speech therapy centre considering the traffic in the city. I went to normal public schools suitable for everyone: up to middle school here in my neighbourhood, then high school in the city centre, where I started commuting, and finally to university where I kept moving around the city.

Over time, I have always travelled by public transport: in my area there is public transport and in particular the city train that goes to the centre. The problem, though, is that the runs end at a certain time and it took me at least half an hour on foot to get to the train stop. When I was a child, my father used to take me by car to speech therapy and then I always moved around by public transport. Commuting was a tiring choice but I think I made a good one because I went to good schools and with the urban train and the metro I could get to school comfortably. The problem was mainly for leisure, because when I was

younger I did not have much time to move around and it was difficult to meet people outside my neighbourhood. Also, to go out at night, I always had to ask my parents to pick me up.

When I got my driving licence, it was a salvation for me. It allowed me to be more autonomous and to move around in total freedom with no timetable problems. The driving licence at 18 was a radical change: for me, the car in this city is fundamental and allows me to decide with whom, when and how to go out. Then in my neighbourhood there is no parking problem and there is basically a car for every person. My husband, although very sporty, had to give in to driving around the city and my mother, who doesn't have a driving licence, always has to be accompanied.

Until my master's degree, I tried to combine the use of the car with public transport. Then I switched to the car because I was tired of following transport timetables, etc. Nowadays I almost always use the car because of a time issue: the idea of waiting for public transport really makes me nervous. It's also very difficult to ride a bike because there are no bike lanes in my neighbourhood, the street is very big and polluted and you don't feel safe riding on it. Plus, in winter it is too cold on the road. I never used car sharing services because I didn't feel safe and I was afraid of not being able to communicate. Interchange car parks are also not very useful for me because my life is very hectic. I used to be involved in cultural events mainly in the evenings and in various neighbourhoods so it was impossible to get around by public transport. Today I work mainly with an association for deaf people and the work is mostly in the office. I basically work at the computer and if I have to meet people I move around by car. I consider myself lucky because I don't have to spend many hours in the car like many people in this city. I also work in a school in a nearby neighbourhood that I can reach by car in about 20 minutes but which would be almost impossible to reach by public transport because it is not well connected and there are no trains nearby. When I have work appointments in other areas, I always try to schedule them at times and places outside rush hour to avoid traffic, especially on the way back. From the COVID onwards, both my husband and I completely stopped using public transport: partly because of the fear of the virus and partly because of the waiting. Then during the lockdown there was much less traffic and it was easier to find parking in the various areas of the city. I expected a positive change after the COVID but there wasn't and I don't think anything will change now with the energy crisis. I still haven't got back the desire to use public transport despite the fact that, with time, I have matured the idea of doing something for the environment and I believe in improving mobility. For example, to go to the centre during the day I would sometimes take less time by city train than by car. Then as a matter of saving money it would be useful to reduce the use of the car. I have a half-hybrid car but petrol still costs money. My husband would like to save on parking, while I don't pay for it because for three years with the hybrid car, parking spaces are free. In my family, I am the one pushing for a change but not having enough time hinders us to change. From a safety point of view, when I drive I am very careful to always notice any potholes in the road, etc. in good time. But it happens that you don't see them, especially when it rains and the roads flood easily. Potholes are unfortunately a great danger and more maintenance should be done. Another problem are the cars parked in the second or third row that block traffic and the poor lighting on some streets that do not allow visibility. I also have to be very careful to hear a siren, an ambulance or that someone is honking at me. I can't always hear and sometimes I have to take sudden action to move at the last minute. As for public transport,

I avoid taking it at night because I don't feel safe both as a woman and as a deaf person. On the other hand, during the day, I have never felt in danger because they are crowded. Safety for me is also greater accessibility: there are not only architectural barriers but also cultural, perception and communication barriers. For example, if the train stops and the loudspeaker says something I often can't hear it. It happened that there was a breakdown and we all had to get off and I just followed what the others were doing because I didn't understand. We need to be more careful because there aren't always clear signs, even though the situation on the metro has improved a lot. You can feel disorientated but it's true that technology helps because apps are used to monitor traffic or transport service communications. I think that individually everyone should do something to change, but the institutions should find stricter systems to move people around. There is a somewhat Italian mentality about public transport: people don't take it because they think it stinks, that it is dangerous and that it is not suitable for children. To go to school, even in the neighbourhood, for example, most children are taken by car. But institutions should provide more connections between non-central areas. Maybe we should be more creative in finding solutions not only to go to the centre.

Quotes

After COVID, today I can't even remember what the underground looks like, I always try to avoid crowds and traffic when I have to make appointments [...] I adjust to the time, the turnout and the rush hour to organise myself.

Safety must also be ensured by both personal and collective accessibility.

Keywords

Disability, commuting, driving licence, freedom, waiting, communication, fears, accessibility, peripheral areas, technology

RL8_IT03, Italy, Valerio has to drive around the city for the lack of adequate public transport for the disabled

Narrative



I am Valerio and I am almost 43 years old. I work in a social cooperative for people with disabilities and I am the contact person for the psycho-social area, working as a peer counsellor to give my experiential contribution. In addition, I am president of a federation for overcoming disability composed of regional associations representing people with disabilities and their families. I live in a south-west area of a large city in central Italy, in an independent living situation with my assistant. I have been motor disabled for 22 years: I am tetraplegic and have limited motor function in my legs and hands. I move and get around with an electric wheelchair and need an assistant to help me with activities of daily living. I have had my driving licence since 2008 and have always moved around by car. After I had my spinal cord injury I took public transport very little. At first I moved around as a transported person because I didn't drive and after 8 years I decided to reclassify my licence. I first started driving a utility car so I needed help getting from the car to the wheelchair and back and didn't feel independent, then in 2019 I got a van on which I can access directly with the electronic wheelchair and put myself in the driver's seat. At work I drive myself, but if the plan is to be out most of the day, I have an assistant for various needs, lunch, carrying various bags with computers, etc. In my private life with my partner I always go out alone with the car. Unfortunately, for those with a disability, the choice to get around by car is a bit of a forced one. Most people I know take their own car or have a driver accompany them. Few people with disabilities take public transport because the daily energy expenditure is too much and the car becomes a compulsory choice. The problem, however, is that although there are subsidies and contributions for hiring a driver or for the purchase of both the car and the equipment/adaptations of the car, the greatest economic burden is on the families.

In the city, it is too complicated to get around by public transport and in some cases, there is no possibility of taking it at all. Some progress has been made in terms of accessibility to public transport, both by road and by metro, but people still don't understand what I think is the main need of people with disabilities, which is to get from point A to B: it's important to think about the whole itinerary and not just taking public transport. It is difficult to move with a wheelchair without a car in some areas to get to the bus stop because the streets are full of potholes, no ramps, cars parked badly and often in front of the ramps, cobblestones, etc. For example, in the street where I live there is a very steep slope that can only be travelled by car or by electric wheelchair. Then when you get to the bus stop, there are various elements to consider: how to get on, the platform that allows you to access the public transport, the space needed both to manoeuvre outside and inside the bus, and then there is the cultural problem whereby seats are often occupied or in general, people have little consideration for what these kinds of needs are. There are people who get fed up because they have to wait for the driver to manoeuvre the platform to let you in or out. The problems are related both to the general difficulty in getting around, accessing the vehicle, and the time that takes so long. In addition, having a motor disability, if you want to take a metro, you cannot get off or get on at some stops because there are not the necessary tools such as lifts. At Termini station, which is a traffic hub where the metro lines intersect, there are other problems because you have to take several lifts and follow various routes, which makes everything more complicated. Even if there were the right tools, however, I would take public transport very little because the time factor matters a lot to me: many means of transport do not have reserved lanes and the traffic in some areas is very heavy. In addition, at peak times the vehicles are very crowded and moving around inside would not be easy.

Another aspect related to the lack of education of citizens is the parking issue. I have a reserved parking space at home and it happens that I find it occupied and I am forced to call the police to have the car towed away. This aspect is part of the cultural plan that still needs a lot of work. In the city, disabled parking spaces are often occupied and there are not enough of them. I hope that society puts in place awareness programmes in which the needs of people with disabilities emerge. Because it's not possible for people to park in disabled spaces and say 'I've been here for five minutes' and not understand that for people with disabilities going an extra 100 or 200 metres can really make a difference. There is no deep reasoning. Today, people with disabilities have a number of standard means of getting around in addition to their own means of transport: public transport, taxis or the disability transport service. The latter allows one to apply for access to a service under different categories such as work, study, therapy, social activities and sport. For work, you have a budget to hire a driver and be transported, while for all categories, including work, there is the possibility of having an individual monthly budget for a number of taxi rides or minibuses that drive you and pick you up. The main problem, however, is that this type of dedicated transport is done in agreement with radio taxi cooperatives, which unfortunately do not have many wheelchair-accessible vehicles. This is unbelievable considering that this taxi agreement was made in 1984 to replace public transport, which is still not accessible. In general, I feel more supported when I have to make a longer journey than when I have to move within the city. On the most popular routes, it is now possible to travel on the train and enjoy the journey like any other Trenitalia [Italian national railway] customer, because I know that by contacting the blue room I am given a certain service, I know that I can get on the train at that time and that the seat is accessible, etc. Information is easily found on the Internet. Even with planes, it is possible to travel today with adequate assistance even though the devices for people with reduced mobility are often damaged or broken inside the plane.

Quotes

Now I am independent both in getting in and out of the car and in getting around.

The cost [for a disabled-friendly car] is borne by sacrificing other types of economic commitments because the car becomes essential for doing anything.

Will there be a possibility to get an incentive to change a diesel car? Or to install a system on the car to not use diesel?

I recently went to the seaside and was able to move along a long cycle path on the seafront with a wheelchair. The problem is that there is no accessible path to the seashore, so I could only see the sea from a distance.

Keywords

Disability, autonomy, compulsory choices, accessibility, wheelchair, awareness and education, infrastructure, reserved parking spaces, dedicated transport

RL8_IT04, Italy, Sayed's family has a plethora of private vehicles in a traffic-congested city

Narrative

My name is Sayed and I am 59 years old. I was born in Bangladesh but I have been in Italy for many years, and in 2017 I took Italian citizenship by renouncing the citizenship of my home country. I have a wife and five children, three boys and two girls. The two girls live in Bangladesh, although I am making arrangements to bring them to Italy, while the three boys live here with us. After doing different jobs, I have now been working since 2013 as a personal assistant, supporting my employer in many ways, doing housework, organising his warehouses and running different kinds of errands. My wife does not work and is disabled. I live in a semi-peripheral neighbourhood. It is an area full of people and traffic, but around my house, it is quite quiet and we have no parking problems. I have no vehicle and use public transportation, but my children have several instead. My oldest son, who organises import-export activities, has a truck, a van, and a car. My middle son has a car and a motorcycle. He works with Glovo and occasionally with his older brother. The younger brother also has a car and a motorcycle. He studies. He takes the car when it rains or is very cold. I have to take three public transportation lines to go to work. From home to the subway I take a bus. Then I take the subway at a nearby station and from there I get to a more central station. From there, I take a bus to get to my employer. In total it takes me about an hour and a half, but if I miss a bus ride it can take me even much longer because the first bus runs every half hour and the second one every twenty minutes. The journey, in short, is not comfortable, because the buses are full of people and you can never predict exactly how long it will take you to get there. I always have to move far in advance. My wife cannot take public transportation. She walks, but she is too weak and frail to get on a bus, with all the people there and the fear of being pushed or falling off from braking. So, she has to be accompanied by someone in a car. Only I don't have an Italian driver's license so one of the children has to drive her. Now, however, I would like to get a driver's license so I can take her out, even if it's just to go out for a ride, otherwise, she never goes out. Since I came to Italy, I never had time to go to a driving school. First because of work, and then because of the need to take care of my wife since when she became disabled. She says she would like to get next to me and drive around a bit, and I want to please her. Now I'm really going to get a driver's license. Having so many vehicles is a big cost for my children, for insurance, the mechanic, and the fines. My children have a license and they know the rules, but sometimes they get fined for irregular parking.

Neither I nor my children use bicycles, electric bikes, scooters, etc. Everyone except me prefers to use the car. My second son uses the scooter when he has to work for Glovo. I have a season ticket for public transportation, and I pay a little less than the full fare because I have a low income. What we want to do, however, is to buy only hybrid

cars from now on, because gasoline costs too much, and then there are government incentives. Also, you can park anywhere in the city, and this, especially for my older son's job, is indispensable. I found all the information about hybrid cars and the incentives on my cell phone by going on the Internet. When COVID happened, nothing changed for us. As soon as the lockdown was over, my children continued to take the car, where they wouldn't risk infection anyway, while I had no choice but to go back to public transportation. When I think of what means of transportation I would like to have to improve my situation, especially to get to work, I think of an electric scooter.

Compared to the people in my community, with whom I hang out, we have several cars, partly because my children work and were able to buy their own. Most people take public transportation because they don't have the money to buy a car unless they live very far away. In that case, they have a car. Many people in our community drive without a license or with a fake license, and they don't understand the signs. When we had a stall that sold clothes, we used different drivers and found ourselves paying an absurd amount of fines. I don't know anyone who uses a bicycle regularly. Maybe just a few guys who are riders and don't have the money for a moped.

As for reducing pollution, I follow all the rules for recycling collection, and I also try to explain them to people from my country, "Why are you throwing this bag in the wrong place? Why didn't you separate the waste? Now we are here, and we have to learn to respect the rules here." Then I am very careful about wasting electricity and gas, especially for economic reasons. Even when I am in Bangladesh, because I live outside Dhaka, I organise my commute by trying to optimise it so that I never have to take a cab again. In the future, I would like to buy a bigger house a little outside the city, so that it costs less. I will definitely have to buy a car for myself at that point, though, and we will have four in the family. I will try to buy a hybrid one.

Quotes

My children had bicycles when they were kids. When they grew up they only wanted cars or motorcycles.

If I could afford it, I would use an electric scooter, because gasoline is too expensive.

My friends, who are from Bangladesh like me, don't have cars because they don't have money to buy one.

Keywords

Frequency of public transport, public transport and disability, Lack of parking lots, Incentives for electric vehicles, Preference for cars

RL8_IT05, Italy, Jovana is one of the few in her community to use public transport

Narrative

I am Jovana, a Roma woman who has been living as a refugee in Italy, in a large city in the centre of the country, for many years, since we fled Kosovo because of the war. I am 51 years old, with a husband and three children. I am an electrical engineer by training, but my title is not recognised in Italy. I founded an association of Roma women and we participate in national and European projects. This is my job now. Before, I worked with my husband in his import-export company that traded with Serbia. Now my husband works with me in the association. After the first wave of COVID, my daughter fell ill with a rare form of leukaemia and now I am in another Italian city with her for a marrow transplant. We live in a very peripheral area of the city, with huge mobility problems, although the situation has improved with the opening of a new metro line. However, trains only run every thirty minutes and at 5.30 in the morning the metro station is terribly crowded. I have always liked to get around on foot or by public transport. Even before the new metro line opened, I never used the car to go to work in the centre of the city. I have a car, but I don't like driving because it creates anxiety for me. Even though I had to change four buses, I preferred to take public transport, which was packed from early morning. Other districts, even peripheral ones, suffer less because they have direct trains to the central station, but in this area, transport has always been a big problem. You always have to calculate an hour, an hour and a half if you move by transport. Now, with the metro, it's easier, but with so few runs you risk losing a lot of time anyway. I don't know why I always preferred walking or taking public transport instead of the car. Partly it is because I am very ecological. I have been sorting plastic caps and bottles for many years, and I don't like seeing all these cars with only one person on board, especially when they are young. When COVID arrived, I tried as much as possible to avoid going out. I worked from home, and I succeeded quite well, as did a lot of people. Almost everything moved online. We all changed our lives to protect ourselves from the disease and not bring it home, to protect our families. Then, in September 2020, I started going out again a few times, but I preferred to take the car, partly because of my daughter. I was even more afraid that she would catch the disease. Even with the car, it takes so long to get to the office, because of the traffic. Like an hour and a half, unless you pay the toll to take a stretch of the motorway and then you save some time.

One advantage of COVID was that people put on their masks. I will always do that, not only because of COVID or to avoid the flu, but also because in a full carriage there are smelly people who are sticking to you, or who have eaten heavily and breathe in your face. The mask protects you, it's the only good thing about COVID. We used to laugh at Chinese or Japanese tourists walking around with masks. Instead, they were smarter. In my family in Serbia, I lived in a town where everyone walked. My mother walked to work every day and walked an hour, even though we had a car. But now, I think I am the only one in my Roma community who doesn't take the car even when I can. Many have like a sort of rejection of public transport. Some for reasons of prestige, because only people

who are really poor take public transport, but others because they just don't know how to take it, they don't understand the language well and they can't read maps. I have always been good with maps. Even my husband used to take the car because, after ten years of living here, he still hadn't learned how to take the bus or the metro. Then I insisted and he has now gotten used to it. Even with my children I always have to insist. They each have a car, so we have three in the family. The one who goes to the university takes the metro, because it's more convenient, while the other one takes the car sometimes and the metro sometimes, depending on where he has to go to work. I insist that they take the metro whenever possible. But I am afraid when they take the car in the evening, as the boys do to get around. I didn't want them to have the moped. I preferred the car because the moped is even more dangerous at night. Many people in the Roma community take their cars and drive without a licence. "Really, a lot of people". They say, "and why should they have to stop just me?" A friend of mine wanted her son-in-law to drive her to the station, but the police stopped them, he didn't have a licence and they impounded his car and fined him a thousand euros. "And I told her, 'see how ignorant you are, because you wanted to be a princess, you couldn't go with the metro to the station. Did taking the metro annoy you that much? No, the annoyance is that now you pay a thousand euro fine plus expenses'. She looks at me and says, 'you're right'. In our neighbourhood, we don't use bicycles or scooters. When you live in the suburbs like we do, it's too dangerous, because of the roads there and the cars running. I was also afraid that my children would walk the stretch of road to the metro. It's only ten minutes, but it's a bad, dark and dangerous street and cars can run into you. I am also afraid, especially at night, because drunks and drug addicts can be there. Bicycles and scooters are fine in the centre of the city, in areas like ours it's impossible. Of car sharing I'm afraid. "I'm really against it. It's too dangerous if you don't know the person you're travelling with". I'd rather invest in more buses and more metro rides. In the future, when I return to the city, I don't know what I will do. Maybe because of my daughter's illness, I feel like I've lost my energy, and when I think of the life I had before, taking public transport all day, it seems impossible to me. It's such an effort! I don't see myself taking public transport to go to the centre of the city again. I don't really see myself doing it anymore, I don't see that I have the strength to do it'. "Even if everyone says I am crazy, I would like to live where there is grass, where there is a forest".

Quotes

You need a lot of energy to use public transport here.

In my community, the well-off take the car every day to go to the city centre.

Keywords

Frequency of public transport, car use in the Roma community, feeling unsafe at night, road maintenance, peripheries

RL8_IT06, Italy, Poor public transport forces Carla to use the car to go to work

Narrative

My name is Carla, and I am 53 years old. I am not married and have no children. I live on the outskirts of a large city in central Italy and work as a domestic helper. I have three clients, an office and two private houses, which are quite close to each other in semi-central areas of the city.

For a few years now, I have mainly travelled by car, whereas before I used to take public transport to go to work. If I had the chance, I would still take public transport, which is cheaper, but the problem is that in order to get from my house to the metro very early in the morning, the buses only run every hour and they also frequently miss rides. So, I often found myself waiting an hour or two for the bus to pass. Then, when you get to the terminus of the metro, a lot of times you find it closed for maintenance work, which has become more and more frequent in recent years. At that point, they have to organise replacement shuttles, but it takes forty minutes, thirty if you're lucky, and in the meantime, people are piling up and there are three or four hundred people waiting to get on these replacement vehicles, queuing up and having to wait even longer. Another thing that happens frequently are strikes. They are announced a few days in advance, so you can organise yourself and take the car, but even those have become more and more frequent, and now it's almost once a week. The problem is that not everyone has a car. I have one, but there are also young guys who don't have a licence or a car and who have to go to work and have no alternative. They miss their day at work, while I have to call my employers and explain that there has been a strike, or the metro is closed for maintenance, or the bus has missed its run and I will be late, sometimes by several hours, and this, if it happens too often, is unbearable. Buses run better and run more often on days and at times when schools are open. Even if I go to work too early, some days I need buses on the way back, and when there is school, things are better. But in summer or at times when schools are closed it is a disaster, the runs are halved. They say that the "school" rides are taken away, but I see that there are not only children who go to school on the bus, but also adults who go to work or return from work, so when they take away the rides it's a mess and you have to wait hours. In this way one loses half a day's work and wastes time that is not one's free time ... for me it's like being at work, in fact, it is worse, but it's of no use to anyone. This way they are practically forcing people like me to take the car instead of public transport. The car is bad for my health and the environment, and it also costs more, but if there are no serious alternatives what can I do? If there were more rides and especially if they were reliable, I would gladly take the bus and metro. When I take the car, in 30 to 40 minutes I am at my place of work, always on time, always perfect. I've given up taking public transport for a few years now, but I have friends who tell me that the situation is still the same, even worse, with more breakdowns, strikes, and

closures. It is perhaps also partly an age-related thing. When I was younger, I used to take the bus more because I was more patient. Now I've stopped. After all the experiences I've had, I couldn't take it anymore. I was fed up with having to call my employers to say I wasn't coming, or I was late, and I was fed up with spending my days waiting at the stops in the street. The car costs more for petrol, oil, tyres, and general maintenance. Now the prices are going up and I don't know if it will always be possible for me to continue using it every day, six days out of seven a week, to go to work. Although there are a lot of people who still try to commute by public transport, most people from my area commute by car as I do now. I think 80 per cent at least use the car exclusively. But there are also other problems. For example, soon older cars will no longer be allowed to circulate in the city for ecological reasons, and on the other hand, electric cars cost more.

In our area, there are also problems in using bicycles or scooters. We are too far away, there are no cycle paths, and the roads are too steep and dangerous. Some migrant guys I know have organised to go to work together by sharing a car. This is possible because they work in the same place, but the city is so big that in most cases people work in too distant places.

I inform myself about transport and environmental issues mainly through television, where there are experts who explain things in a calm way. I prefer that to going on social media, where everyone has their say and, in the end, you don't understand anything. For the future, I think that if prices continue to rise, from January I will try again to go by public transport to see if anything has changed. I will also enquire whether I can use a car-sharing system from the metro terminus. I think protecting the environment is important. "We can also help." If there was support from the state to buy electric cars, for example, that would be important. But I think we should invest in public transport, renovate trains and stations, and improve frequency. I would be willing to pay more for an annual ticket to be able to travel decently. This is something I also hear from others. "Let's go eat a few less pizzas and pay that extra money because in the end, it's good for the environment and also for us". What is important is that we can travel comfortably and arrive on time. If there was an alternative to the private car, I would gladly use it.

Quotes

One of the line of the metro regularly breaks down every two or three weeks.

If public transport worked a bit more efficiently, I would never use the car if not to go on holidays.

Keywords

Commuting, strikes in public transport, maintenance of public transport, costs of car maintenance, costs of electric vehicles

RL8_IT07, Italy, Kofi would like cars and traffic to decrease in the city

Narrative

My name is Kofi, I come from Ghana and I have lived in Italy for eight years. I am 34 years old and have a wife and two children. I live in a semi-central area of a large city in central Italy.

I work as a construction worker and always go to work by public transport because I do not drive. I wake up early in the morning and at 5.30 a.m. I have to be at the bust stop to wait for the bus. After the bus I walk to the metro station and then, after some metro stops, I walk to my workplace. I come back home around 6/7 p.m. When I don't have to work, I usually don't go out and prefer to stay at home. But when I have to meet my friends and chill out, I reach them by public transport or my wife drives me there. When we go on holidays, we travel by plane or car and my wife always drives. I don't have a driving licence: it's one of my dreams to have it but so far I've tried once and failed the test because it's all in Italian. Italian is not my mother tongue and it's very difficult for me to understand everything. I feel bad for my wife who has to drive so much on long journeys because if she gets tired, there is nothing I can do to help her. I would like to drive myself instead. When using public transport, there are sometimes problems: buses and the metro are full and drivers do not stop to let people on, or you may miss the connection between two buses because they are late, etc. Sometimes there is too much traffic, especially in the evenings. Early in the morning, I have no problems, but when I go home I can get stuck on the bus because of congestion. Another bad thing for me is that sometimes when you are on the bus, people never come close to you. This has happened to me several times, but I don't know why. Maybe because I am a foreigner and people don't like to sit near me. If there is a free seat next to you, they just stand. Sometimes I also feel unsafe in the metro because you can meet strange people, some are drunk and approach you as if they want to beat you up. I am not afraid, but when they come close to you, you can worry. Apart from that, my area is well connected and I can move everywhere from my house because I have a bus stop nearby. If I have my smartphone and I have the location to go to, I can get anywhere by following the directions online. I always used public transport even when I was in Ghana because I think it is a good way to get around. The condition of vehicles here in my area is also good. Two years ago, buses could not pass or stop at some stops because there were cars parked everywhere, now the situation has improved and cars can no longer park at stops or overtake buses. I think the traffic situation will be better in the future. In my area they are also working to make the roads bigger so that buses can pass well. They are working in the right direction. I like to be on the bus and listen to music without talking to anyone. Even if I had a driving licence, I would still use public transport because driving in the crowded city is difficult for me. I don't know if I will be able to drive here. Sometimes it is true that by using your own car you go faster, but I am used to public transport and for me it is the best thing. My wife would like me to have a driving licence and it is also true that with children it is better to

have a car. I don't see children on buses because it can be difficult for them and you don't know who you will meet on the bus.

My workplace is too far to get there by bicycle, but in 2015, when I worked in a neighbourhood near my home, I used to get there by bicycle. But now I work in different places and cannot use a bicycle to get around. I liked getting around by bicycle, it was a good experience because you feel energised early in the morning. Also, drivers would let me pass and stop to give me the way.

As for the lockdown experience, it changed my habits a bit: I was scared to be on the bus and now, if I don't have a mask, I don't get on the bus any more. I don't want to bring home any disease to my family. Also, if the bus is too full, I don't get in. I would like everyone to use public transport because I see it as an easy way to get around the city and I think the traffic conditions are too bad. There are too many private cars on the streets and I would like people to stop using them. One person can buy two cars, another three: it's a shame! I hope companies stop producing them and I would also be happy if the cost of petrol continued to rise so that people would stop buying cars. I think if people started using public transport, bicycles or scooters, traffic would decrease and everyone would move easily with less pollution. There is too much pollution here and I was shocked when I got here because I lived in a village in Ghana and I had not seen this. The responsibility to reduce pollution and change habits lies with individuals, not politicians. People think they can move faster and don't waste time in cars, but they don't think about others. Most of my friends and family have their own cars: we are different and they are used to moving around by car. I don't think they will change, it's too late now.

Quotes

Everyone goes up and down, this and that way, and when I am in the car with my wife I am always afraid of people coming from all sides.

People are addicted to travelling by car,
There are too many cars here compared to where I come from: you can always hear the noise of engines and horns.

Keywords

Driving licence, feeling excluded, fears, public transport, traffic, parking, pollution, noises, cultural shock, individual responsibility



RL8_IT08, Italy, Fabio is concerned about climate change and has chosen to travel with electric vehicles.

Narrative

My name is Fabio, I am 36 years old and I have been working as a researcher in eco-biology at the university for several years. I have been living with my partner in his house in this area of the city for 10 years. The area is relatively central and in the last 4/5 years, the transport situation has improved a lot after a new metro line was opened a few hundred meters from the house. Even before it was potentially well connected because we are close to a high traffic route and two major motorways in the city. At 50 meters from home, we have the tram stop which passes quite frequently. I tend to either travel for work over long distances - and then by car or train - because I work at a university which is not within the city, or I have the possibility of smart working - and then I stay at home. The days are very variable: if I have to work in person there are days when I take the car and days when I take the tram or bus to the station and then take the train and go 200 km away. In the last two years, I prefer to take mostly the car for long distances because I bought a half-hybrid car that consumes much less, I feel less guilty about pollution and I spend much less. There always has to be some petrol in the car but it is recharged by dynamo when you go with the engine brake or when you are in neutral. In the city, I practically don't consume, while on the motorway I consume much less than in a normal car. The problem with using the car is always the traffic because the streets get congested and it happened that I was stuck in the car for almost two hours.

Otherwise, daily movements are on foot both for everyday needs like shopping and seeing friends. I live quite a neighbourhood life. If, on the other hand, there are medium trips within the city to see friends and relatives, I use my own means of transport, so either my car or my partner's moped, since mine was recently stolen. I like using the moped much more than the car because I have fewer traffic problems, I can get through even when there is a queue of cars and I don't have the problem of parking. I've been riding a moped since I was 15 so I don't feel unsafe riding it now. The fact that I don't have a stable work situation means that I have different weeks all the time and it is more difficult for me to calibrate myself on public transport, for example. If I had a clearer travel routine, I would definitely favour using public transport more. I have taken buses both at night and during the day and have never felt in danger or uncomfortable. With respect to car sharing, I have tried it several times even abroad but always had problems and was never able to use it because I did not receive confirmation/feedback from the potential driver. As for the bicycle, I don't feel safe riding it in the city because there are no adequate facilities. They recently made a bike lane on the road in front of my house but they simply drew a white line on the roadway which narrows the road, creates more traffic, and is used more by mopeds because cyclists don't feel safe. In addition, the geological conformation of the city does not make it easy for me to travel by bicycle: it is very hilly and in the summer, when I tried, for example, to go to work by bicycle, I would arrive exhausted and hot. Then

bicycle thefts are very common so when I use it I always have to take it home. I have never thought about the electric bike but, with my partner, we recently bought the electric moped. This will allow us to save a lot of money because my partner also works outside the city and has to go to another municipality every day. Charging columns for cars and mopeds are very rare, so we bought a moped with a removable battery that can be recharged at home or at work. The lockdown hasn't changed my transport habits much because I've always had the option of smart working even if to a lesser extent. The effect that COVID has had on my habits, however, is that now, even though there are no longer any obligations, when I get on public transport or trains I always wear a mask and I am more annoyed by the idea of being pressed among people. The economic and ecological aspects are very much at the forefront of my choices given my study and work interests, which lead me to consider climate change on a daily basis. I think there should be a maximum of one car per family and there should be a ban on driving alone. Unfortunately, I also drive alone because I don't see many other solutions. The problem in my area is always traffic, and I honestly cannot see what the solution is to decrease traffic jams: I don't know if we should reduce the use of cars or perhaps change the pattern of travel flows. By decreasing cars, people would also feel less in danger taking their bikes. My friends and acquaintances have similar transport practices to mine and there's a certain sensibility. A lot of people have taken or are considering taking the hybrid car after I took it. And those who take public transport are usually people who live out of town, not in their hometown, and who don't have the financial means to maintain the cost of a car. They complain about means but have no other options. For the future, I would like it to be easier to get around with electric vehicles and to have the assurance that they will not run out of power in the middle of the countryside. I would like to have both electric vehicles with a longer lifespan and a more widespread network of charging columns. Currently I am forced to make specific detours to go and recharge the car and to remember to take the battery home for the scooter. Internet, apps and social media are the main means I use to find information about getting around, recharging my car and new modes of transport. Currently, with the energy crisis, I expect that the cost of using a car will go up a lot and my worry is that I won't be able to afford to move even with a hybrid car. The car would be the first thing I would sacrifice even though I expect that the costs for public transport will also rise.

Quotes

The thing that stops me from doing or not doing something by car is the thought:

Do I want to stay an hour in the car instead of the theoretically necessary 20 minutes by moped?

There's not much of a culture of cutting down on cars to make everyone better off.

Keywords



Electric vehicles, pollution, traffic, neighbourhood life, moped and bikes thefts, travel routine, infrastructure, feeling safe, bike lanes, climate change

RL8_IT09, Italy, Catalin does not like public transport but has to take it every day to eat at the soup kitchen.

Narrative

I am Catalin, I am 49 years old and Romanian. I've lived in Italy for 22 years and worked as a bricklayer until eight years ago, when I got injured on the metro construction site and underwent 11 operations on my spine. The last job I did was very heavy and that's when my first hernia came out and I had to have the operation. The fact is that I could only be on sick leave for a month and when I went back to work they made me do the same things without thinking about my condition. The doctors made a lot of mistakes by putting and removing plates and stabilisers but never managed to fix the hernias. Unfortunately, 100% legal disability was only recognised a year ago and it's hard for me to get by with what I get. I also lived on the street until they gave me citizenship income. For four years I have been living alone in a hotel in a remote suburb of the city because with the 600 euro I receive I could not afford to live closer. I also have a daughter here but I haven't seen her since I fell ill. I don't drink but I also need the money for medicine, etc. To get to the first useful station that takes me to the centre of the city and to the soup kitchen, I have to take various means of transport. The problem is that for the last three months the coach and train company has been doing what it wants: they skip timetables, skip runs and waits can be more than 30 minutes. I check the internet, but the timetables never match. I then with my disability have difficulty standing as there are no benches to wait at the stop. I wake up early in the morning and it takes me more than half an hour to get ready because I have no feeling in my hands and legs. At 6.30 I leave the house to go to the bus stop 300 metres away. The bus arrives around 7:10, then I take the city train, a metro and finally a bus that takes me to the soup kitchen. In contrast to buses and trains, in the metro the waits are very short except on holidays. In total it takes me more than an hour and a half to get at the soup kitchen. I go there every day to eat one meal a day and I thank God that at least I have that chance. After eating I return home by the reverse route and get into bed because I can't stand too much. The problem with transport is also that on public holidays, like Christmas, New Year and Easter, the bus and train don't run in the area where I live and I get stuck at home without being able to eat. I even came with lockdown because I couldn't eat at home. I don't have many friends and I never ask anyone for rides. The vehicles are usually in good condition but the waits are terrible and you can't ask the drivers anything about why they are late because they swear at you immediately. I

also feel sorry for the people who take the bus with me and arrive late for work. After the lockdown, I saw so many people take their bikes to avoid waiting for the bus. Even when I worked, I always travelled by public transport, living in another suburb. To get to work at 7.30 am I would leave home at 4 am. The problems of delays and waiting remained the same and then there are always strikes. I even tried riding a bicycle but to get to work was too far from where I lived. I never got a driving licence because maintaining a car is too expensive. Petrol and diesel have risen so much lately though they are not a deterrent for people to reduce their car use given the delays in public transport. People will never give up their cars rather they go into debt to pay for petrol. Because of my condition, I have concessions by travelling by public transport. I have season tickets with both the bus company and the suburban bus company: the former I pay 20 euros a year, the latter 20 euros a month, which is not easy for me to pay.

On public transport I have often felt in danger. The guards do nothing and only look at their mobile phones while there are robbers. Once three gypsies followed me to rob me and it was very difficult for me to escape because I can't walk properly. In my opinion the metro is the most dangerous means of transport in the city. I saw a lot of robberies both on the metro and the bus and I reported the thieves to the guards but they did nothing. After 7 p.m. and on Saturdays and Sundays, I'm even more afraid because there are few people and the thieves can point at you: I have to hide the rings in my pockets because the thieves think I'm rich and I always go around with paralysing spray. I hope that public transport timetables will be observed and that the guards will do something about the situation with the thieves. But I don't think anything will ever change. The pollution situation is only a state issue and the individual can't do anything on his own. Honestly, reducing pollution is not my problem.

Quotes

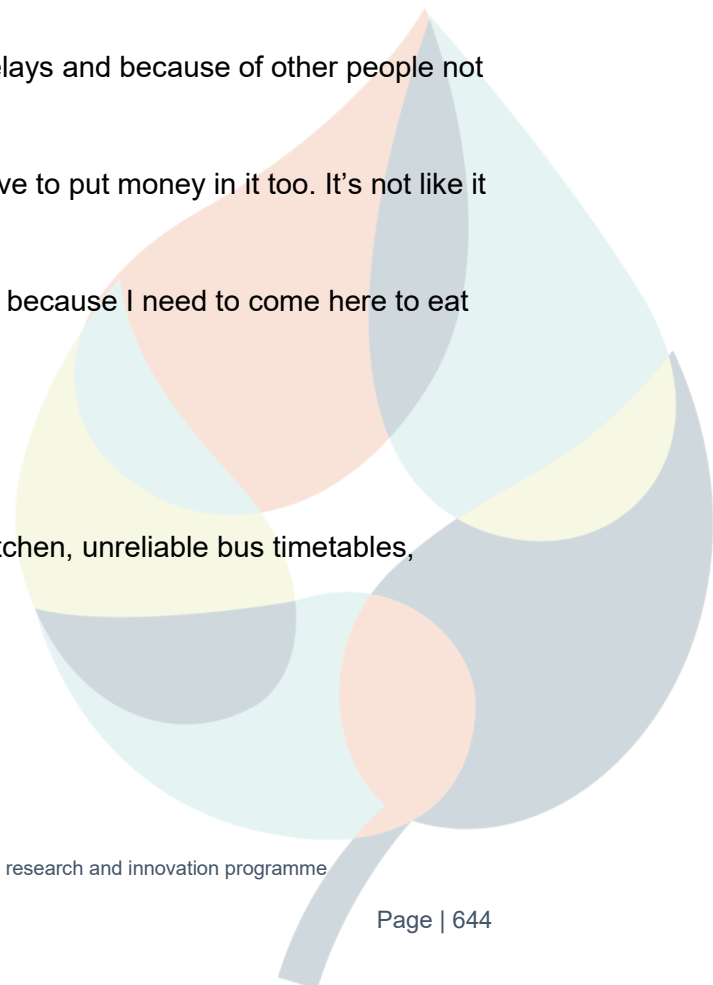
People lose their jobs because of public transport delays and because of other people not being on time.

When you buy a car and put the keys in then you have to put money in it too. It's not like it walks on its own.

Unfortunately I can't avoid paying [the season ticket] because I need to come here to eat since the money is not enough for me.

Keywords

Disability, occupational injury, state subsidy, soup kitchen, unreliable bus timetables, delays, bus connection problems, car costs, thefts



RL8_IT10, Italy, Helena leads a life without schedules, vagabond and green, riding a bicycle

Narrative

My name is Helena, I am 49 years old and unemployed. I am of Finnish origin and have lived in Italy since 2005. I have done many jobs in my life: first an emergency doctor and then, when I arrived in this city, a real estate agent and interpreter. I speak many languages and have lived in various countries in northern Europe. I do not have a fixed home and I move to live with friends in different parts of the city. I am a sporty person and I consider myself a 'green' person: I do not pollute, I recycle, I eat organic and I put interpersonal and moral values first. I like reading and I am waiting to do my internship to get my second degree in psychology. I always move around by bicycle, both for logistical and health reasons. In northern European countries cycling and sport are a philosophy of life: we are born and bred that way. The first thing I do when I arrive in a new country is to buy an annual public transport season ticket out of a sense of civic duty and look in the advertisements for a bicycle to get around comfortably. Here, I sometimes load my bike onto public transport, although it is not easy. The trams are not fast and there is a pole in the middle of the entrance door that hinders bicycles getting on and there is no handrail to help cyclists and disabled people. Riding a bicycle in this city is not difficult, but you have to be aware of the dangers: the potholes in the roads, the glass on the ground and the rude drivers of cars who turn corners at the last moment without using their indicators and insult you or address women without respect. Sometimes I reply to insults in the local dialect and sometimes I get some Italian friends to speak back. Traffic has the power to bring out all frustrations. I cycle on both cycle lanes and normal roads to choose the shortest routes, also because I often find cars parked uncivilly on the lanes and I am forced to move onto the roads or go the opposite way.

In general, I try to avoid public transport for my emotional and psychological well-being: the problem is not the bus or coach drivers, who are usually polite, but the passengers who annoy and do not pay the fare. Sometimes there are also maniacs on the buses who expose themselves but I don't feel in danger because I studied psychology and I know these types of frustration. I pay no attention to them or to narrow-minded elderly people who complain or shout because I don't want to waste precious time and I am focused on the music in my headphones and my books. Even waiting at bus stops and bus delays do not make me nervous because I engage my mind in other ways. On the other hand, I feel in danger when I meet policemen because I see abuses of power when they arrest people without justification or ask for documents from people who are rushing to catch trains. I think the police take away people's civic sense, waste people's time and never intervene with thieves.

The lockdown for me was psychological violence and I felt robbed of my time. I have never felt stressed on public transport because of COVID because I live and study there. For example, when I was studying remotely for my master's degree because of COVID, I

used to study on trains because I lived with a violent guy who broke many of my smartphones and I couldn't attend classes. I used to take long-distance trains to outside the city and spent my days up there in the heat, at my desk. Here, libraries close very early and often you can't even access the toilets. When I used to work, I used to walk to the centre and had to dress up, but nowadays I always dress comfortably so I can get around easily by bicycle. I don't have a driving licence and I am against using a car because of the increase in gas emissions. However, if I am with other people who use cars I don't impose myself on others and get into the car with them. With my boyfriend, we sometimes take the car and there is no conflict between us. For long distances, I travel by train and rarely by plane but if it were up to me, I would live in a solar-powered mobile home. Many people in my circle of friends think I am an extra-terrestrial because of the free life I lead. Maybe if I had children I would also take the car for their safety. The car for many people can be vital but I prefer to subject myself to danger and ride my bike. Car-sharing solutions can also be a good option for many people but I don't want to waste energy, pollute and get bored with people talking in the car. I think a lot of people don't want to get out of their comfort zone and will continue to use cars even with the energy crisis and rising petrol costs, but maybe some people will start cycling. I would like to see people start using solar battery bicycles.

Quotes

On the bike I feel free and light. It's like having a second pair of legs.

Car drivers here drive worse than in the jungle.

Time can never be regained, health can.

Keywords

Green living, free life, wandering, cycling, lack of respect, infrastructure, well-being, civic sense, violence

RL8_NO01, Norway, Affordability, comfort and safety for women in the Oslo transport system

Narrative



Yeah, well, my name is XXX. I am 42 years old. I've lived in Oslo for 13 years now. In downtown Oslo I work in the public sector.

My transportation needs are partially met. As long as I've lived in Oslo, I've never owned a car. Mainly it's been because I've been living so central, that I haven't really seen the need, and especially since I live alone, it's also as you're well aware of, it's also quite expensive to have a car in Norway in general. I think in Oslo there's also always the issue of finding a parking spot. So I've never really seen the needs and I've always considered owning a car as being something that would be more suited for two people together more so than one especially with the salary that I have. But I do use public transportation also quite frequently. I've used to, my work changed the address of where we work a year and a half ago, and up until that point, I didn't actually use to buy a monthly pass for public transportation because my work was so close to where I live, it would take me 10 minutes I would back then I would actually walk quite often and I would more. More so just buy a single ticket whenever I was going somewhere that I felt was too far to actually walk. But now my work is like 40-45 minutes walk from my own place, which I find just a little bit too far. So ever since we moved there. I have bought a monthly pass for the public transportation pretty much every month, which I also find that that also causes me to take public transportation quite a bit more than I used to be honest, think before I would just walk downtown if I needed to go downtown now I'll just take a tram if I go downtown so yeah, I take it quite a bit now.

On a normal workday I would walk up to xxxx it which is close to where I live. Take the bus from there to my job and I would take the same route on the way back. The ride is about 10 minutes maybe like right under 10 minutes, I think depending on traffic. I guess, I do go to the gym. But the gym is fairly close. It's pretty much one bus stop or tram stop away so I usually walk when I go to the gym. Also, I live quite close to XXXX so if I'm doing errands there, I will just walk. But if I go downtown I might take the tram or the bus. And also, if I'm visiting friends who are not living in the nearby area here like for example I have a good friend that lives in XXXX, and then I will I will take public transportation there. I have to say I mean especially coming from a smaller city in Norway. I do feel that especially where I live it's fairly accessible. Different modes of transportation I mean, I'm on six, seven minutes walk away from the subway I have a tram outside of here, a bus rides out outside of here, so it's fairly accessible and they do go quite often. I do have to say though, that I find it quite bothersome that they are so packed and full during rush hours. I mean I've come to realise that, for example, especially in the morning, for example, if I take if I take the bus to work in the morning, I feel like I either need to get going before eight or I would have to wait until 9,30. I've experienced having like three four buses just drive past me packed, unable to fit more passengers onto it. I think also to be fair bus xx that I take to work is one of the busiest routes. You can't actually physically fit on board. And to be honest, I also find it quite uncomfortable. So this, I think more so than accessibility in terms of available buses and trams. It's more like in certain areas of town. It's really, really packed. And compared to the price of what you actually do pay. I think it's strange that they don't actually even increase the availability and those hours that they know are more busy. I think to be honest, I find it quite expensive. It's almost What is it now? 880 kroner a month? And I mean, I'm one person I mean for me, that's a lot. It's almost 1000 Kroners. So it is a lot and especially now with raise of other prices. It's definitely something I have at times considered or maybe I should use wait a little bit to get my monthly pass. Because I have other expenses too. I mean I'm just one person but

I can only imagine how it's like if you're two adults and two kids, for example. It's a major cost. I think, to be fair, I think if they really do want to encourage people to use public transportation, they should make it more accessible and in terms of prices too. I used to have a bike also. At first I had a bike that got stolen. I learned the hard way that in Oslo you shouldn't really have a bike that's too nice. Because then you don't really want to lock it up anywhere. And then I got a really cheap bike which was fine. But it's really sort of restricted to which like which parts of the year you can bike and the weather here is kind of unpredictable and basically from this time of year from October on until March, April, it can be fairly difficult to bike Yeah. Because of the climate basically. Corona definitely affected how I considered moving about in the city. Because the bus is how I experienced it. I mean, the buses and trams and subways there were definitely less people but it was still not little enough to feel comfortable especially in the beginning of the pandemic when we were all still a little worried and insecure about how it could possibly affect us if we got it and of course also since my workplace basically enforced home office for quite a while. I was basically staying at home and like I said I think my new my new work address has been the main reason for why I've been regularly getting the monthly passes. So with that gone, I pretty much walked everywhere. I only took the bus like desperate times which I can't even think of one time where I did but I yeah, I pretty much stopped taking public transportation. Oh, well, of course it becomes more inconvenient. It's like, I mean, I guess then again, during the pandemic, you were restricted to your home in a way anyways. And you were maybe you weren't really able to visit friends as much but it definitely kept me isolated from some of my friends that lived further away than others. And it also made it more difficult to get around. Like, I mean, I remember for example, one time I actually thought I had COVID and I had to go test myself also, which was really sort of an impossible situation for me because the nearest test place was like 45 minutes walk from here. And obviously I couldn't take public transportation because I was having symptoms, and I couldn't, really because I'm alone in my household, I couldn't even ask anyone to drive me either. So, I ended up walking and it was like in the middle of the winter and I was sick I had a fever. But still I had to like make the long walk and walk all the way. Regarding the environment, I think we all share responsibility. I think personally, this is something that this is something that I would say I'm probably more concerned than the average Joe when it comes to like how much each one of us can contribute, I mean, of course everyone. Everyone can contribute, but I think it's also sort of a like chicken an egg discussion on it in the way that I mean, what really matters is what what's really important is policymaking. Because that's where the real power is. I mean of course you have power as a as one singular consumer to but then on the other way of course consumers also have the power to influence policymakers. But I think definitely it's been a frustration for me when it comes to public transportation, and I mean, politicians keep talking about how they want to encourage people to make use of public transportation, but they don't really make it accessible enough for I mean, especially families who move maybe outside of the city outside in the sense that they have to pay for even extra zones. And I mean I have colleagues who live outside of the city and they basically say that it doesn't really add up you know you it's actually more expensive to pay for public transportation passes each month for all the family members compared to having a car. I think it should be way cheaper than it is. I think in an ideal world, it would be almost free but that's obviously a utopia. But I think it shouldn't. It definitely shouldn't be at the point where it is today. I think if it was almost free, or even I mean, if it was free,

everyone would take it. I think definitely, price is a big factor for a lot of people. I would like to get an electric bike. I wouldn't really use it to move around the city but it would be to go back and forth from work, and maybe go visit some of my friends. I have a good friend who lives in xxxx. So, it takes quite a while to get out there with the bus. And I actually hate to taking like every time I'm there over the weekends I hate taking the bus back because there are always so many really, really drunk people at the bus. It's like a party bus on the way back always. And I would have loved to just have an electrical bike to cycle back home. But it is too expensive, right now. I have I've never experienced anyone being threatening or violent towards me, but I have experienced being on a bus late at night and people act out. But I haven't really I remember one time I saw it sort of unfolding so I just moved to words like silently move towards the front of the bus because I saw that this was a situation that was going to escalate and the bus driver actually handled it really well. He just stopped at the next stop he literally like went back as this was at the very back of the bus. He just walked back to the bus and literally like physically threw out the person from the bus and like went back up front and kept driving. So, but I mean it's happened a few times. Yeah, but it's I felt uncomfortable at night and I've ended up like going off the bus. Maybe it stopped for two before I actually am supposed to get off because I feel uncomfortable. I do know of women who have experienced being groped or have experienced male attention more aggressive than what I've experienced. I actually had an episode of molesting on a taxi once and I reported the incident to the taxi company. Because I had a taxi driver who made sexual suggestions towards me. This is maybe 10 years ago. He was driving me home. I was currently living with a man and my then boyfriend was away from work. And the taxi driver questioned me about if I was if I was living alone, or like the it made me uncomfortable in the sense that I felt like he was trying to figure out is she going home alone or is someone waiting for her? Will someone miss her if something happens to her now? So I got uncomfortable and I just lied and said, yes, my husband is waiting for me at home. And then he asked went on asking me if I had slept with a lot of men before I met my husband Yeah. It was quite an uncomfortable experience to have to undergo that experience. There are so many reported incidents with the police of women being harassed by taxi drivers. So, if you are a woman you should really be careful. Female taxi drivers for females, this is what is needed. I don't really go out as much anymore but getting home safely, especially over the weekends late at night, is the thing that it used to concern me more when I used to go out before. (The interviewee later, after the interview has ended and the recorded switched off recalls another episode of being molested, which was recounted more or less in this way: I was alone in a carriage of the underground and this large guy sat beside me and started to chat me up, I found his manners intimidating, I was obliged by the circumstances to have a conversation and physically I felt that I was cornered, I was concerned of getting off and not being followed, so when my stop arrived I jumped out at the very end before the doors closed running out and saying that I had just realised that I was at my stop, luckily nothing happened at the end)

Quotes

Female taxi drivers for females, this is what is needed.

Everyone can contribute, but I think it's also sort of a like chicken an egg discussion on it in the way that I mean, what really matters is what what's really important is policymaking. Because that's where the real power is.

Keywords

Affordability, safety, comfort, women, gender

RL8_NO02, Norway, 0

Narrative

A normal day for me is a little hard to tell because I work as a pilot, so I you know, either I use public transportation or my car to get to work to the airport. And then I'm out flying for many days in a row and then I come back so then I wouldn't be in Oslo for that time. But if I do day trips, then you know it's commuting back and forth to the airport. On my days off, then normally, I don't go anywhere, I'll stay in the city and hang out with my friends or go out on a boat. In terms of transportation I would probably do a mix of walking and taking the bus normally at the weekend. I do like office work for the Union. I am a union representative. There's a lot of the time there's stuff that I have to carry or I have to go back and forth a lot. Normally it's easier with a car. When I go to the airport, it depends, I might instead use the AirPort Express to the airport unless I go first to the city, in which case I might use the car. You know, sometimes it's a time thing and early in the morning. There aren't any buses to take me to the centre and late at night. There aren't there's no public transportation from the airport. Like last night when I landed that 2am At the airport, there's no public transportation and that's just not for me as an employee that's also for passengers. You're going to have to take the car. Yeah, yeah. Other than that, oh, it's normally a time management thing. I think it's just easier if I have the car. I think it's a bigger problem than just me like all my colleagues, we all have to drive. So yeah, I definitely think that should be addressed. I think there should be public transportation options in the middle of the night because if there are planes landing and leaving, people should be able to get to the airport. I think that public transport is too expensive, for one hour ticket is 40 kroner. I think that should be much less to make it accessible. Especially when they're making it more expensive to drive a car which I understand why they do it. I don't necessarily agree with it all the time. But they should definitely make public transport cheaper if they make car use more expensive. I feel that people then would probably use it more. I think like most people that I've talked to find it quite expensive. When it comes to how effective it is. I feel like the public transportation in Oslo is pretty effective or efficient. We have a lot of different modes of transportation. Which is good. I think sometimes the frequencies could be higher. I used the bus a lot on the line x and it leaves every 10

minutes, which in many places would be a lot but not in the middle of the city. That's the only bus we get to take us downtown and actually it doesn't always come at the 10-minute mark more every 15 minutes and that can be inconvenient. I do enjoy driving. But I've lived in lots of different cities in the world. And I find Oslo to be the worst city to drive. And it's not because there's a lot of traffic. It's mostly because you probably know I feel Norway and infrastructure are two words that don't combine very well. I feel like some infrastructure is okay. But when it comes to roads and the layout just stressful, and it's not you know, make it's not made well for the driver or the user at all. So it's just starting and stopping and lots of variables. It just makes it a confusing city to drive in Paris is easier. Brussels is easier. London is easier. It's not the traffic at all. It's just you know, horrible signage. No logic, you know. The speed limits, I find them to be unsafe, because they vary all the time, you have to be more worried about that then looking at the road and focusing on driving. And that happens even on the freeway. They alternate between 90 and 100 all the time. There a lot a lot of blocked corners and you can't see easily but all of a sudden you can't make a turn. So you've got to drive a very long time in order to get to where you want, because they blocked a turn, which to me is a little counterintuitive. I would rather get to where I'm going and stop my car I think anybody would. In terms of sharing the road, where there are bike lanes it is a lot better. Pretty consistently if you're driving in a car, you're following the rules but if you're on a bike, you don't necessarily have to know what those rules are so there are a lot of times where I see a conflict where a bike will run red light. I saw that the other day, and then a car almost crashed into the bike. I feel it myself because if I'm on a scooter or a bike I don't feel the same responsibilities of following the rules. I hate electric scooters, but I still use them a lot in the summer. I find them practical. I find them both horrible. Not for myself. I hate other people using them. But I still do use them myself. They're very convenient. But I also noticed with myself when I get on one that I lose my hat, you know, just since you the effort you put in when you're standing on it is basically zero. I feel like my brain just kind of switches off. And that's kind of what I see with other people too. They don't give a shit about pedestrians. I see that all the time, they're in the road, technically they're supposed to stop for pedestrians but they drive by anyway. Anyway I always think having choices of different means of transport is good. We shouldn't be too limited. We should get the options and make good choices.

Regarding bike lanes here, I feel that the interaction between the car and the bike not working out very well because it's in the same spot. In other places they are separated. You have your bike lane, but it's separated by a line of trees or something like in Copenhagen. And you have better lights for the bikes. There's a lot of times like if I'm driving a car and I get a green light and I'm making a right turn. The bike in the bike lane also has a green light and goes straight. So there's a lot of potential for conflict where I'm going to hit a bike on my right turn, instead maybe the bike lane should get a red light when I get a green light, you know. I talked to some local politicians about it and they said you know this was the way it was chosen. They chose to take away road area from the cars. They call cars the hard traffic and give the road to soft traffic like bikes and pedestrians. I feel like maybe the way that it ends up is not necessarily optimal for either bikes, cars or pedestrians. Back to public transport, I feel that the subway here is really good. There's a lot of space. They are pretty frequent. I wish they would build more because it's very limited but yet spacious and nice. But normally when you get on all the buses that I take, which is normally the x and x around Oslo, they are full a lot and there

aren't enough seats and the tram, it depends on the time of day but a lot of the time is full, also at night tram is full.

They ordered these new trams They're huge. But they decided to put a few seats in them, which I found really strange because if I'm going to be on a tram for more than two or three stops, I want to sit down. It's weird that they are designed like that without seats. I've always felt safe on public transport. Probably lucky. I've never felt unsafe. I think that sustainability and reducing carbon emissions is super important, I guess the biggest challenge that we have, but our little minds are too short sighted to make big changes before we can see the effects. If all individuals took the right choices we would be fairly well off when it came to our climate discussion. If you take a bike or if you walk, maybe you plan your day a little bit better and take an extra 15 minutes and walk more. Personally, I have horrible memories from biking from when I was a child back at school; it was wind everywhere and raining but now I have considered here and I think next year we're (himself and his partner, GPM) probably going to get bikes. I think I want just a regular bike. I don't think it is too much to ask to put a little bit of your own energy into propelling yourself forward. But I would probably use it more for leisure. A weekend type of means of transport.

I feel like in the municipality they're promoting it by building this network of cycle lanes But I can't think of any information campaigns or subsidies and, and incentives to buy bicycles. At some point the city launched a bike sharing scheme, and it was really good and they still have them, I have used them a fair bit but then I saw the electric scooters coming up, I tried them and I switched to them. I just saw them around. Normally I get information about different means of transport just moving around the city for work or to visit friends. Another issue with them is that sometimes people use them when they are drunk, especially youth, and then they just throw the scooter on the sidewalk, now they actually have they're trying to crack down on it. But the fact is that when you're drunk, you don't make the best decisions. Especially when you're young, you don't know any consequences and you get on one of those and it can be dangerous. Eventually the municipality limited the amount of them.

I have thought of joining a car collective and just sell our car in order to better our economy but my partner didn't want to. He doesn't use it, but he really wants us just to have a car at our disposal. But I tried to get my car rented out through the scheme called "Get around" so that I could share my car. But then there was some trouble with my car and its locking system that prevented me from providing a keyless rental. If I could say what I would improve to make the transport system more sustainable I think I would wish infrastructure to be better. I would like there to be more subways, having a better network that traverse the city, instead of a very centralised system. The airport is also close enough to have maybe a subway instead of using the normal trains. To me, that's almost like the peak of sustainable public transport in cities because it's electrical and it's underground. They're switching to the electrical buses, that's a good thing. And I really want an electric car but I can't afford it right now. They are too expensive and now they're starting to tax them again, which I find that it's a pity, because we're halfway with switching. They've managed to change out a lot of the cars in Norway to electrical cars, but there's still a way to go and they're removing all the incentives now. But I also think that buying an electric car in and of itself, is not necessarily sustainable, if you already own a car, and it's working, just because it's not sustainable to build a car. Even though I grew up in a time that has been very tolerant to LGBTQ compared to generations before

me, I feel like there's still some part of society or some individual that isn't always going to be comfortable with it, then sometimes I just adjust to that. So sometimes we hold hands when we walk on the streets, but normally we don't. The reason that we normally don't is probably that we don't feel like dealing with the problems, even though I haven't really had a lot of them. So, on the on the bus or tram we're not normally affectionate. I don't think we've gotten any comments but particularly if you're going downtown and there's a lot of rowdy parties and a lot of people on the bus, then we're just probably not going to sit there and be affectionate. We probably are affected subconsciously.

Quotes

I think it is too expensive for one hour ticket to be 40 kroner. I think that is too expensive. I think that should be much less to make it just super accessible. Especially when they're making it more expensive to drive a car which I understand why they do it.

Even though I grew up in a time that has been very tolerant to LGBTQ compared to generations before me, I feel like there's still some part of society or some individual that isn't always going to be comfortable with it, then sometimes I just adjust to that. So sometimes we hold hands when we walk on the streets, but normally we don't. The reason that we normally don't is probably that we don't feel like dealing with the problems, even though I haven't really had a lot of them. So, on the on the bus or tram we're not normally affectionate.

Keywords

Price, convenience, comfort, LGBTQ+

RL8_NO03, Norway, 0

Narrative

I'm 39 years old, living by myself at the moment. In rental apartment. I do have a partner, but we live separately, I have a master's degree in legal sciences and I work as civil servant. I do use public transportation to and from work. Just about every day. I've been experimenting with different ways of getting there. I think for the last months, the most typical way has been that I first take the tram to the centre and then I take the metro from there to work. And that journey sums up to about 30 to 40 minutes. On a typical day I will then return directly home, maybe I will go grocery shopping on the way and at that point, it

might vary a bit, whether I do the same route home with the metro and then the tram, or I'll take a bus. That will travel more directly towards my neighbourhood. There are two available bus that are relevant to me. One of them stops quite a bit away from where I live, but it's practical for going to the grocery store, among other things, and the other one stops just outside my, my apartment block. But it also has a longer route and travels through the centre to get back while the other one I mentioned will travel directly so all this depends on my plans for the evening. If I'm doing something social after work I will typically just take the metro to central Oslo and stay there, and then I'm probably either take the tram or walk home. I find the physical location of my workplace offices. Highly impractical. There's a lack of direct routes from my place of residence to my place of work. And because of the switching in the morning commute, I have been experimenting by taking the direct bus I mentioned that travels slowly through central Oslo area and then back up to my workplace. Unfortunately, that also tends to take a long time, especially in the morning rush hours. So, I'm dissatisfied with my options from my personal circumstances, but they are kind of unique to me because the combination of where I live and where I work, but also the place where my offices are located seems to be an area of development for Oslo in general, and especially public services seem to be placing a lot of their, their offices in this area. So, there seems to be a lot of pressure on the public transportation, that goes there as well. I think there's been a large influx of workers to this area, and particularly during the under lockdown, so the transportation services hasn't noticed the surge until this year, when people finally started going back to the offices in larger numbers. I do notice the different modes of transportation, are highly unpredictable, whether they be arrive on time whether the amount of space available to sit or stand. So I do have a very unpredictable commute. I feel, both in terms of the time it will take and in terms of how comfortable the journey will be From my perspective as a passenger, I find that there's a lot of room for improvement.

I think that definitely it needs more, more capacity on the lines and probably more routes going from different neighbourhoods directly to xxx (the neighbourhood of her office GPM) and more frequency because there seems to be a large influx of workers in this area lately, and the current public transportation offered doesn't seem to reflect that fact. Just about all of the metro lines already go through here and that's the most pleasant transportation. In a lot of cases you will have to go through central Oslo, particularly if you're going from west to east, as I'm doing. So more direct routes that go directly from west to east and from east to west instead of having to go to the centre and changing there. In terms of affordability, I think they're pretty much fine but there's no competition, you only have one provider of transportation services. So if you're dissatisfied you can't just try someone else. And with that in mind, I feel for the price I'm paying they're not providing the quality of service, I would expect, but it's definitely totally affordable to me and I'm certainly not the wealthiest person in Oslo. I don't have a driver's license. So, getting a personal car or getting in on a rental collective or something like that would not be for me. I did use to walk to work to home from work all the time when my employer had their offices located in central Oslo. It's just a 20-minute walk from, from where I live but because of the increased distance physical distance that's not an option anymore. I don't think that cycling would be for me I am a bit scared of it, and I also find the vault unpleasant. In terms of sustainability, the tram and Metro are electrified, and then among the buses, there are still a lot of old fossil fuels ones around but they also have more modern biofuel, buses and also some electrical so they are doing something to improve

the sustainability of public transport. Electric scooters I personally found them to be kind of a madness because the companies that were behind this seem to put all the responsibility in the hands of the individual customer, and people as we know are not necessarily very considerate of each other. So personally I'm happy that the amount of scooters in Oslo have been drastically reduced and as a pedestrian it has certainly improved my, my experience. Also, I think that I used to be very positive about the tram system in Oslo, but I think at this point is probably a source of more problems than it solves because of the fact that they are reliant on tracks. As soon as there's a problem somewhere on the line the whole system breaks down, suddenly you have problems all over the city. So maybe now the buses are starting to get more environmentally sustainable we could replace trams with buses that are more adaptable, that can change their frequency on a very short notice. Also, even if my workplace has moved I still like to walk a lot, and there's always some kind of work on the sidewalk, which causes you to have to have to move across the street. Sometimes the zebra crossing are deleted, which makes difficult to cross streets. Further, there's a lot of places there, there is no lane for cyclists, so they use the sidewalk as well, which does make things impractical both for the cyclists and pedestrians. So, I would very much like if Oslo was more friendly towards pedestrians.

It's relevant here to mention also that I am trans feminine, and I transitioned last June. So, up until that point for 38 years of my, my life I presented and was treated as a man. So it's still a new thing. I have personally not experienced any sort of direct harassment directed towards me. Apart from feeling uncomfortable I haven't had any, any bad experiences. Nevertheless, I do try to be mindful of not staying out too late, and in the rare case that I am out at night I try to be mindful about which transportation alternative, I choose. I don't like to stand around on specific bus stops or metro stations, very late in the night and if possible I do like to have someone else, traveling with me. Even back before I transitioned I did find it uncomfortable when there were large groups of rowdy people particularly men. The sense of discomfort comes from two areas. One of them is possibly being target of some sort of sexual harassment, that I might be targeted by predatory individuals and the other is the fear of transphobia. Particularly after the terror terrorist attack this summer (Oslo had a terrorist attack in a gay club conducted by a far-right extremist GPM), I did see a lot of reports, both in the media and from my social circles about gender non-conforming people that did experience attacks and harassment, in particularly in metro stations. And that has stuck with me. I had one acquaintance of mine who was threatened with the machete just after getting off the metro and then another one, who was dunk down with water by a bunch of teenage boys right after getting off the metro. In Norway, I would say that racism or antisemitism is frowned upon but transphobia tends to be disregarded as just a difference in opinions and not punished as harshly by public opinion as other types of hateful attitudes are. And I think that's mainly the problem that society as a whole, just let transphobic attitudes, grow. As for the police force, I don't actually have a much confidence in them. You might have caught the fact that there was recently a survey, among LGBT q plus people about their confidence in the police: it wasn't very flattering to the police though. I have seen instances of outright transphobia among service people in the police. I do not believe they take hate crimes seriously at all, especially against queer people, but clearly they have a problem with racism as well. And I don't know what can be done about it, to be honest, it's a systemic issue, I feel it seems to be hopeless to try to solve it.

Quotes

I do notice the different modes of transportation, are highly unpredictable, whether they be arrive on time whether the amount of space available to sit or stand. So I do have a very unpredictable commute. I feel, both in terms of the time it will take and in terms of how comfortable the journey will be.

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Keywords

Comfort, convenience, efficiency, safety, transphobia

RL8_NO04, Norway, 0

Narrative

I'm 32 years old, I grew up in a Norwegian city with quite good public transport, but I got early on my driving licence and for me mobility has always being associated with using my car and the freedom that it gave me, so mobility means a lot for me. I live close to the city centre, and I normally walk to my workplace but recently I have subscribed the bike sharing scheme of the municipality, which works well for me and is cheap. I have used the bus only two or three times since I moved in Oslo two years ago. On a normal day I go to work and come back. I have a stressful job (community nurse GPM) and I feel very tired at the end of my shift. The trip to work takes me 30 minutes walking or ten minutes cycling. The city bike scheme costs only 150 Kr (about 15 EUR GPM) for a month. They have different places that with large parking rack, and you can check on the app, all the parking spaces around town if there are available bikes, and then it's just to make your way to find the closest one. They are unisex conventional bikes with only three shifts. I would say that the service is fairly popular, you could occasionally find empty bike racks. If there is a lot of snow and the rain comes and then it gets cold again can be a problem cycling but I think that they have made these bike lanes they are on the main road for the car, it's like a separate lane. And I think they are quite good removing the snow from the bike lanes better than on the sidewalks. They have been developing the bike lanes but we have a problem with the roundabouts, where the lines stop, because they are not safe for cyclists.

It is up to politicians to improve this situation, I think they are making more difficult using cars and they are doing more bike lanes so I suppose that this is pushing people towards a broader use of bikes and public transport. I haven't noticed campaigns for encouraging cycling but I noticed signs saying "thanks for using your bikes" and the company of public transport has been running a campaign in the summer with large signs encouraging the use of public transport. But I moved to Oslo in October 2020 during the pandemic and back then there was concern about using public transport, so I thought to minimise the risk just walking around and then I discovered the bike sharing scheme, and I started using it. Eventually I got used to move around this way and I stuck with it once the restrictions were over. Another matter is that using public transport to get to work would have not saved me much time, so I didn't see much of a benefit. Said that, for the little that I have used it, I think that the public transport offer is very good and the information is readily available. And for the little that I have used it, I have always felt to be safe on public transport and nobody bothered me (the respondent is a Norwegian citizen but from an ethnic background with distinctive features that make obvious that he has a non-Norwegian heritage GPM). I have a car but I mainly use it to travel to visit my family that lives outside of Oslo. Reaching them without a car would require a longer and less practical journey. Another reason for owning a car is to go skiing. Last winter I took up skiing and this winter I intend to ski too so I will need my car to reach the ski slopes. Anyway, I find it hard to drive in Oslo, much harder than in any other city in Norway where I drove. I suppose they purposefully make it hard to discourage citizens from using private transportation. I have noticed in the summer that the use of electric scooters is becoming more and more common and unfortunately a lot of drunk people use them and there has been a sharp increase in traumatic injuries. No, it doesn't do for me, I don't like them and I don't think I will use them. I have also notice that the use of electric bicycles is increasing, more and more people are using them where I work. But I don't think that there is any scheme to promote them or any incentives available. But I think that they should have such a scheme if they want to get more people to cycle, although right now I don't think I would make use of it because I am happy with the bike sharing scheme (they used to have an incentive scheme foe e-bikes but as far as I know was discontinued GPM). Further, they should keep developing the bike lanes. Said that, I think there's only so much you can do to make waling and cycling attractive in winter with the cold and the snow.

Quotes

I'm 32 years old, I grew up in a Norwegian city with quite good public transport, but I got early on my driving licence and for me mobility has always being associated with using my car and the freedom that it gave me, so mobility means a lot for me.

When I moved to Oslo in October 2020, and that was before some of the most major lockdowns and they were quite used mask on the bus and blah blah, blah, but I thought, shit what the heck why not just minimise the risk totally of getting infected. So I just I walked and that has, it has stuck with me and then after walking a lot I discovered the offered with Oslo city bike and then okay, yeah, that's super.

Keywords

Walking, cycling, cycling scheme, Covid-19, car

RL8_NO05, Norway, 0

Narrative

I live with my son and two cats in a 3-room apartment in the suburbs of Oslo. I work as civil servant. My work is not too far from where I live but far enough for me having to bike or take the subway to work. Usually in the summer months I use the bike for my commute, I have both a normal and an electric bike and depending how much time I have I will take one of the two. On rainy days I usually take the subway but it takes me a while to walk from the station to my office so the time is the same than cycling there. I go rarely to central Oslo and by bike it feels scary and unsafe to go there, there's much traffic and you have to cross tram lines occasionally, further the roundabouts are dangerous, cars don't see you. And going by subway is quite expensive, you have to think about how much would it cost to go back and forth because the prices have gone up so much. Sometimes I work from home because after covid we got this opportunity. I usually don't bike in winter because I feel that's unsafe. I have winter tyres with spikes but still they don't remove the snow from the bike lanes, actually that's were the snow ends up. So you are forced to cycle on the road where the cars are and they don't like it. I had accidents, once with my son, who usually seats on the back of my bike, so that was scary. It's good that we have more and more of bike lanes (they are those type of red painted on the road itself GPM) but they always end before a dangerous intersection or a roundabout and the you have buses who will stop on the red area of the bike lane creating a problem and a danger because then you're forced to go on the road where the cars are.

There should be something like a hard edge to signa l cars that they cannot get into the red area of the bike lane, because they often do. I use bot the traditional bike and the electric, the traditional when I have more time and I wish to exercise, while the electric to be quicker and to cover longer distances. I think that electric bikes became more and more common here in Oslo especially after during the covid pandemic. I think it's very expensive. Going back and forth, it's almost 100 kroner and it's that's a lot, especially when you're a family like mine where you're alone with the kid. It's like 2 dinners, so it's a lot. And if you're just going like two or three stops is like as expensive as going for an hour, so it's that also is something that I think is kind of silly because sometimes you really do have to do the subway for just two or three stops. If they want us to use it more than the single ticket should be cheaper. For me to buy like a monthly subscription would be meaningless. I want to have that freedom of being able to bike when I want not feel like I have to use the subway because I paid for a subscription. Well, the need for going to the

office is changed because before Corona it was obligatory to show up for up your office every day. We were not allowed to have Home Office unless it was some very special occasion or it had to be like granted from very high up in the organisation. And then when Corona hits and we got the Home Office. It has given us much more freedom to decide where to work. I wish that safety for bikes was improved at intersection and in downtown Oslo. I hope that they can increase the number of car free areas in the centre. When I used more buses, I felt that there was an issue of safety especially at night. I felt unsafe waiting for a bus at night and there were several instances in which I was harassed and I witnessed other women being harassed. So I believe that it's important to have bus lines that run 24h and with a good frequency so that you can wait less. Other things that could help could be better lighting and security cameras but also having a system like in the underground stations, where you have a button to press to call for help if someone is bothering you: this could be done also for bus stops. But unfortunately sometime the bus stop has poor lighting and it's just a pole without any information or anything. I also have a car because I live alone with my child and sometimes that makes life much easier to take him to places. But you need to think very carefully when you use it because if there's no free car parking around, like a shopping mall for example, it because very expensive to park. I have never noticed any campaigns by the municipality to promote sustainable mobility, like cycling or walking or else so I think that something could be done in that respect, especially to inform people on new bike paths and new bike lanes.

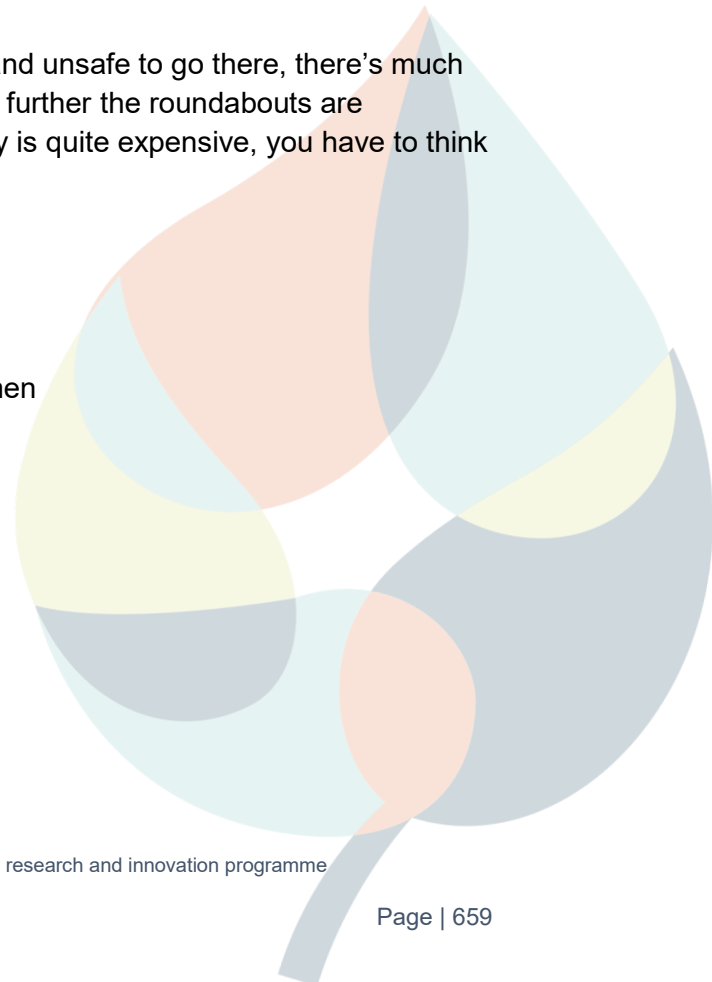
Quotes

(Public transport GPM) I think it's very expensive. Going back and forth, it's almost 100 kroner and it's that's a lot, especially when you're a family like mine where you're alone with the kid. It's like 2 dinners, so it's a lot.

I go rarely to central Oslo and by bike it feels scary and unsafe to go there, there's much traffic and you have to cross tram lines occasionally, further the roundabouts are dangerous, cars don't see you. And going by subway is quite expensive, you have to think about how much would it cost to go back and forth.

Keywords

Cost, public transport, cycling, covid-19, safety, women



RL8_NO06, Norway, Disabled and with limited mobility options due to unsuitable transport system

Narrative

I am 42 years old. And it's also useful to say that I have a disability. I have cerebral palsy and I use an electric wheelchair to move about outside. I work as civil servant. I have a flexible work situation, I can work from home if I wish but I have also an office and I have responsibility over other workers. I would say that I spend 60% of my time working from the office and 40% from home. I use mostly my car when I go to the office. I do have an accessible car provided by my employer and I have a reserved parking space at work. My work is in a location that would make it difficult for me to use public transport and further public transport at winter. Driving is difficult in central Oslo, they have made many streets one way only but my main problem is parking. I should get access to reserved parking for disabled but they are poorly designed, do not offer enough space to operate the lift for my electric chair, so often depend ending on their layout I cannot use them. A further problem I that some people decide to take those spots even if they are reserved to the disabled. I would say that 50% of the times the cars parked there do not have the badge for disabled. Because of these challenges I have always to plan plenty of time ahead to reach a destination. The buses unfortunately are of little use. They don't have an electric automated ramp so you need to call the driver each time that you want to get on board. There used to be many problems, for instance in winter, with the frost the ramp used to get stuck so now the drivers are supposed to use a hook for dislodging it but they, believe or not, often didn't know where it was on the bus and I had to tell them. I've been refused access to the bus so many times because they said it was too full, when it really wasn't, and once a driver said "I can't let you on because the wheels on your wheelchair ruin the floor of the bus." Several other bus drivers said it wasn't their job to drive me. Nowadays I normally do get on the bus but it's still stressful for me and the driver, and they need have a tight schedule. I have travelled in many countries I don't understand why we can't have an electric ramp like on buses in other European countries. And that solution when I tried in other countries works fine, that makes me feel less of a burden. Trams and subway are normally not accessible. The subway has some accessible stations but most of the time the gap is too big between the platform so my wheels will actually fall into the gap. And I've tried to talk to them so many times about you know, at least giving out a map where it shows the accessible stations where the gap is you know, small enough and they haven't been able to do that and I don't understand how that can be so hard. The same problem is present with the tram. I had a meeting with them (subway managers) and I told them about you know, in other countries, this little thing that comes out and sort of eliminates the gap and they had never heard of it before. I'm like how can this possibly be if you're on the head of a subway? Do you not know about subway systems around the world? Like this is? Yeah, it to me it was it was weird. But, but no, they haven't. With trams again you have the problem of the gap at the platform and on top of that the old buses have

internal stairs. The new ones supposedly don't but they still run on the same lines of the old ones so you don't know which you will get. Further, I doubt that the gap problem has been solved with the new ones and anyway there is no information available for wheelchair users on which stops are accessible and which are not. Trains can be an issue too, on some of them you need the conductor to operate an elevator and you need to book for assistance 48h in advance at least. Then you need to spot the conductor on the platform and in busy circumstances and tight schedule can be nerve wrecking. But actually it can be a problem also for the bus because you need to wave and call the attention of the driver, there is no other way. Then sometimes you have the problems of space on the bus. The space reserved to wheelchairs might be taken or occupied by someone who doesn't have the right, so you need again the help of the driver. Some passengers are good, other don't seem to realise that they are standing in a reserved space and you need to ask them to move. Driving in Oslo has been discouraged and this meant less car spaces, which has also affected disabled people. Occasionally if disabled people don't find reserved spaces they might, depending on the layout, take a normal space, but more importantly with less spaces available you have more people without disabled badge that take disabled reserved spaces because they can't find a regular space. In winter things are even worse because the municipality hardly clears enough the sidewalks and I can easily get stuck, so essentially unless I am sure that I can drive to a place and that the parking is really next to my destination, I don't go out at all. I would like to drive an electric car but that's something difficult too because a car that has a battery large enough to power the car and to deal with the wheelchair lift isn't something easy to come by.

Quotes

I've been refused access to the bus so many times because people well it's been too full they say, when it really hasn't, and one on one bus said "I can't let you on because the wheels on your wheelchair ruins the floor of the bus". Another bus driver, well, several other bus drivers said it wasn't their job to drive me.

Trams and subwaysI don't normally I don't take them because they are not accessible.

I had a meeting with them and I told them about you know, in other countries, this little thing that comes out and sort of eliminates the gap and they had never heard of it before. I'm like how can this possibly be if you're on the head of a subway?

Where the pavement would normally have you know one of those curves that go down there's now like 20 metres of snow hard packed snow, and it's just impossible for me. So most of winter time I have to drive outside not on the pavement but actually out on the road and that doesn't feel safe and so yeah, so in wintertime I'm basically even more you know, like if I can't drive by car and get to pretty much next door to where I want to go with I'm just not going to go anywhere. Because it's just, it's just too hard.

Keywords

Disability, wheelchair, accessibility, public transport, barriers, reduced mobility

RL8_NO07, Norway, Priced out of Oslo city centre

Narrative

I'm from Oslo. I live with my parents, and they're both retired. Therefore, we do move around in Oslo a lot in car. Normally we stay away from the Oslo central area we would move more towards xxx, and xxx (two municipalities other than Oslo) both because of the parking situation in Oslo is really bad and it's cheaper that way, but when I move along alone without my parents I use public transport. Sometimes most of the times I actually do take the car because I'm not a big fan of public transportations. The reasons for avoiding Oslo central are the very expensive parking and also the great number of one-way roads that force me to drive a lot in circles before reaching a destination. An also in this way I pay the congestion charge only once while if I would go to Oslo, I would have to pay many more tolls go and come back. Off course it's still cheaper with public transport. But because I normally take the car, which is very expensive nowadays to run, I try to minimise these costs choosing destinations that would cost me less. I have I've considered selling the car and just using public transportation but it's going to be very difficult because of my parents and their limited mobility, they are not able to walk to a bus or train station, maybe I could drive them to the train station and we could take the train into Oslo but then again, in Oslo s my mom is not able to walk much even five minutes. I have not looked much into other options like car sharing but I feel that my households need for car it's so big that I have to ignore the expenses or at least just somehow force myself to adapt. Public transport is very good. I'm not a fan of it, but if I must use it, I feel it's very easy and there's lot of buses, trains, trams and the metro. So you don't have to wait for hours till the next bus, it's always just 10 minutes 15 minutes apart. What I find difficult is payment system. To pay in the public transportation has become really difficult especially for older people that don't have smartphones and the bus driver or don't take cash or card. You have to have tickets before you board. I use the app but I feel that elderly people or those people living in Norway who don't understand or can't read Norwegian, they would have some problems actually purchasing a ticket (the respondent is from an ethnic background, second generation immigrant and she lives in a neighbourhood with a high proportion of residents who are immigrants GPM). I used again public transport last year for the first time after 10 years because of personal reasons (the respondent is on disability benefits and she has been diagnosed with a chronic illness,

GPM). And it was difficult for me to pay without the app. Now I take public transport only once or twice per month. I think it's not too expensive but off course, for those that take it everyday it can be expensive. I feel that public transport is too crowded and with my personal circumstances is difficult but I am trying to take it more to save money. I never use public transportation at night-time. If I have to go for dinner with friends or visit friends in the evening, I normally take the car or a cab because I don't feel safe enough to take public transport at night but I haven't experienced anything bad. I'm just trying to avoid experiencing it. Regarding cabs I've heard of assault episodes we read about in the newspaper but I've never experienced anything like it myself and I always felt really safe. Normally, when I take a cab, I would call my sister or my mom and tell them I'm in this cab with this number and I'm coming home and I've never had any problems with it. I have considered cycling, but I haven't done it yet. I did it when I was a child but not now. But to be honest I don't think I will ever get a bike and cycle nowadays. The weather would be a problem, and I often move for shopping with my parents, it's my way of getting them out of the house, and so the bicycle would not be of use. If I could afford I would buy an electric car, I know the government is going to discontinue the VAT exemption soon. It would be cheaper to run. They've made very difficult for car owners using Oslo centre I think that's really sad because some of us, even if we don't want to use car, we are in situation where we have to use the car and so it's difficult. We know we would come more often to Oslo if it wasn't for all these problems with where we're going to put the car. If I drive my parents to Oslo that will cost 400 Kroners in just parking. And with the congestion charge and gas we spend 700 Kroners just for a trip into Oslo. And for me that would be 50-80 Kroners with train but I have to spend 600 more because I have parents that are in a situation where they have reduced mobility. We have applied for a disability card, but it was rejected and the doctor was adamant that we would not get it. The doctor didn't even want to apply because he told us that he has patients that have amputated both their legs and they didn't get the disability card too! I feel like in making the plan to have a green city, the government failed to remember the weakest in the country we live in. That's elderly, and I feel like more and more of them are just sitting inside, day in and day out, because that's the only choice they have right now. Yeah. Because not everybody has someone who can bring them and take them here and take them there and take care of them and I know a lot of elderly people who are just alone. I have social anxiety and this is why I can't be on public transport with a lot of people. And this was before Covid. And I know many people who have these problems. And during Covid I was nowhere close to Oslo centre because I was very concerned, especially of me catching it and infecting my parents who both have asthma. We are now back to normal. Eventually we caught it and we recovered and so we have now overcome our fears. I would just like to conclude saying that I wish the public transportation was easier for elderly to use, and also for people that have some mental challenges.

Quotes

I wish the public transportation was easier for elderly to use, and also for people that have some mental challenges.

I feel like in the making the plan of this green city and environment the government failed to remember the weakest in the country we live in. That's elderly, and I feel like more and

more of them are just sitting inside day in and day out because that's the only choice they have right now.

They've made very difficult for car owners using Oslo centre I think that's really sad because some of us, even if we don't want to use car, we are in situation where we have to use the car and so it's difficult.

We stay away from the Oslo central area, we would move more forward to XXX and XXX area, both because of the parking situation is in Oslo is really bad. And it's cheaper that way.

I have social anxiety and I don't like to be in a room with a lot of people, also on a train or a bus with a lot of people I need like at least one metre around me.

Keywords

Affordability of mobility, marginalisation, elderly, mental illness, car

RL8_NO08, Norway, At night I have strategies to keep safe

Narrative

I moved to Oslo two years ago for studying actually and I decided that I wanted to stay here for a while. Now I'm living in the in the apartment of a friend. I'm renting a room while looking for buying my own apartment. I share an office space not too far from where I live right now in an area that is semi-central. I often walk to my work place, it takes me 15 minutes. Otherwise if I am late and need to be quicker I use the tram, which is just two minutes away from where I live. But the tram is often very crowded so I actually prefer walking. I think that the tram is too crowded in rush hours particularly. I often use the bus too when I go to my yoga classes. It is more or less the same situation, it can also be very crowded, but often when I take it late in the afternoon it's better. When I meet socially friends, I sometimes walk to the city centre and sometimes I take the bus or tram, depending on how much time I have. I love walking. I usually don't feel unsafe on the bus even at night, because there are other people around, but I can remember one instance, I think it was during Covid, in which two boys approached me, nobody was around and I felt concerned but eventually I had a chat with them and I had the impression that they didn't have bad intentions, so I relaxed. I kept using public transport during Covid, but I

protected myself using masks. More generally I didn't change my ways of moving around. I kept doing my usual life.

I don't have a bike, I used to live in Bergen, which is not a city suitable for cycling (I think she means because of the weather but she didn't elaborate GPM) so essentially, I am not used to cycling but I have seen many people cycling here so I am considering getting a bike. But I think that I will get one once I get my new flat, I don't want to have too many things to move around. I think that the public transport here is quite good. You have a good frequency, something that in Bergen you don't. And I think that here there is a better connection among areas of the city, you don't have necessarily to go to the centre and out again. I know several people cycling who attend my office but regarding myself as I mentioned I am not considering to get a bike right now. Electric bikes are something I haven't considered too much either but I have heard that they are expensive so I don't think that I will consider getting one.

For me the price of public transport is not too expensive because I use it sometimes several times per day so it makes sense. But for those who visit me, sometimes only for few days, I feel that for them is too expensive to buy just one-way tickets or 24h subscriptions. I used to have a car in Bergen but when I moved to Oslo I decided that here I was better off with public transport. I have considered joining a car sharing scheme once or twice, because I do photo shoots and moving around with cameras and materials can be difficult by public transport, especially if I go to a location that is outside the city. Especially after getting more secure about driving in Oslo because I don't know the city that well. Bike sharing is something that I haven't considered or tried because I use public transport to move quickly around the city but actually if I have time I would rather walk around instead. The same for electric scooters, I have tried them once but because I take the monthly public transport pass, it doesn't make sense for me to pay also for an electric scooter. I don't miss having a car, public transport suits my need, the only times I miss it is when I need to carry a lot of things but my flatmate has a car, so sometimes I ask her to take me somewhere if I have much to carry. I haven't noticed any campaigns in Oslo promoting public transport if not on the bus themselves.

Overall I think the public transport is good but I think that the one-way ticket is too expensive. But in general I think that public transport, at least for me is financially accessible. The city is quite crowded though and so in rush hours there are times when the buses and trams are too crowded and having a higher frequency of them would be good. I pay attention at my safety at night, I avoid walking long distances, I usually take the public transport anyway, but I choose carefully where I take a seat trying to avoid people who look drunk or on drugs. When I walk at night, I might follow someone that looks trustworthy, or I change direction if I see someone who looks troublesome. In general, I feel safe when there are other people around. That's why I avoid walking in isolated areas to get to a bus stop, so if I visit my friends at the outskirts of Oslo I usually take a taxi to get to the bus stop instead of walking there.

Quotes

If I take the public transportation I would always like take a look around me where to choose my seat, because I want to, you know, avoid if people are like seems unstable in a

way yeah. Or they use like drugs that you can see in their eyes that yeah, there's a lot of that in Oslo.

Keywords

Public transport, walking, safety, crowded

RL8_NO09, Norway, 0

Narrative

I am 36 old, male and I live in a quite central location here in Oslo. I live with my partner and my 2,5-year-old daughter. In the morning I walk my daughter to the kindergarten, which usually takes about five minutes because it's close. Then I take the bus from the kindergarten to the office in central Oslo. My partner instead takes the electric bike and goes to work to the other part of town. On the way back from work we move in the same way. At the weekends sometimes we take the bus or two bikes if we go to the woods that are not that far, or we might visit family in which case we take the train. But we are also using car sharing services to visit our families. We also use car sharing to go for shopping, just for few hours. It's usually easy because there are many of these cars available nearby. Sure, if we want to go away for the weekend, we need to remember to book the car sharing in advance, because it could be fully booked or become too expensive if we wait too long. I think that public transport is good I am very happy with it. There is a good frequency of service, at least on the routes that I use. There are some routes that are not as good especially those that cross the city instead of going downtown but then sometimes I used electric scooters to get where public transport doesn't go easily. So sometimes I get off public transport and I complete my route using electric scooters. My partners she does a route crossing the city and for her is easier to go by electric bike because is faster and also provides her with more flexibility, she doesn't have to wait for a bus. I think that the public transport is affordable but it is affordable for us, yet is 900 kr per month, so we decided to have a single bus monthly pass. It's still a cost that is a motivation to look for alternative means of transport. So, I think that we will buy another electric bicycle the next summer. So, we will discontinue also the only bus pass we have. My partner aims to use the bike all the year around with winter tyres, but we will see how she does in December because this is her first winter. In terms of cycling, I think that is quite good in Oslo, it has been improving much in the last few years, with more and more bike lanes. I usually find bike lanes on the routes I do. There is problem of bike lanes stopping abruptly at junctions co it can be improved but generally I have seen more people cycling around and also motorists are getting more used to cyclists. I think the main problem of safety is with electric scooters, people seem to pay less attention, they

might have music in their ears and they often swap lanes, going from the bike lane to the sidewalk to the road and I have seen several accidents myself involving electric scooters. I think part of the problem is that it is not clear the nature of electric scooter and whether they are meant to go on the sidewalk, the bike lane or the road. The municipality eventually has restricted their number, but I haven't seen awareness campaign regarding safety of driving the scooters. But more in general, I haven't noticed any public campaign regarding mobility or sustainable mobility. Financially the electric bike is quite a costly purchase, but we have calculated that we recover it in about two years of use. But it is expensive for most people, not everyone can go and buy an electric bike spending 30.000 kroner (about 3000 EUR GPM). I am very positive about car free areas, I think they are very positive and I hope that there will be more in Oslo. Because they reduce noise, they increase safety, they reduce pollution. But I see how this change depending on where you live, I think that if you live in a central area is a good thing but if you live far away in the suburbs maybe working downtown it might be more difficult for them. I feel that public transport is safe for me, even at night but then I am 36 years old white male, so not one of those categories of individuals who are usually worried of walking around. My partner tells me that she thinks whether walking or taking public transport at night and she told me that sometimes she felt unsafe especially if there weren't many people around, so that has been on her mind. Covid it's when we started biking and we bought the electric bike. During that time, we almost didn't use any public transport. So, after Covid my partner who works farther away decided to stick with the electric bicycle because she enjoys it and I went back riding public transport.

I think that expanding car sharing could be a good thing to improve sustainability in mobility in Oslo. Because at some point we were considering getting a car but then once we started to use car sharing and we realised that we had several cars available to access nearby we didn't consider any more buying a car. But we shouldn't discriminate those people that need a car. It's still necessary to have parking spaces, which is a contentious matter, also in the housing community where we live. Not listening to car owners might produce much unwanted resistance. There are some needs that can't be covered by public transportation now.

Oslo is also a quite diverse town in terms of income, socio economic perspectives. We are lucky that we have two middle class income some can throw 30,000 into an electric bike but not everyone in this town can do that and the people that can't also tend to live quite in the outskirts of Oslo, so thinking about sustainable mobility, we need to think about the social dimension as well and how can we have enough versus going out or connects this part of Oslo to the rest of the city. I think that's really important.

Quotes

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I also think there should be enough parking spaces for the first of all, let's not discriminate those people that need the car.

There are some needs that can't be covered by public transportation now.

Keywords

Public transport, cycling, electric bikes, electric scooters, car sharing, parking, social exclusion

RL8_NO10, Norway, 0

Narrative

I work in Oslo, but I actually live in another municipality outside of Oslo and I work in the public sector. I live with my partner and two children. On a typical day I take my children to the kindergarten walking, it's just next door, and then I walk to the bus stop, which is a ride of about 10 minutes to the boat terminal. Then I take a boat that takes me to Oslo, which takes about 22 minutes. It is an electric boat. Then I walk five minutes to the underground station, and I take the metro towards the east of Oslo. From the underground station of arrival, I walk five minutes more to my office. Sometimes, in the summertime I take the electric bike on the boat and then I cycle to work. I believe that the means of public transport I take are comfortable and punctual, so they work well. The boat is always on time and has always available seats and it synchronises well with the bus. We are a small municipality of only 20 thousand people and on the boat, you most often meet people that you know so it is also social. The underground connection is also good, they are very frequent. So the door-to-door journey is one hour and fifteen minutes. I believe that the public transport is reasonably priced but it would be good to have other options because currently you can only buy single tickets or monthly subscriptions. But if you go only three days a week to the office or if the kids get sick and I need to be at home, you then don't make much use of the monthly subscription. I wish they had some uh different ticket models. So, for instance, like you can buy single tickets, but the minute you have bought more single tickets than the price of a daily card it automatically switches to like a day card. Or like buying a bulk of single tickets discounted that you can use them when you need. Or if I have bought twenty to twenty single tickets within a month, and that equals the price of a monthly ticket., then the subscription should automatically change to a monthly ticket. Because before Covid we could work from home only exceptionally if you really needed to be at home. But now, they are testing a hybrid version and you can regularly work from home a part of your time and my employer has realised that they have to offer some flexibility in order to be attractive for employees.

I have lived on the island three and half year but before I was living in Oslo and I have used it much at all times but I have always felt safe. I think an improvement could be having more electric buses for instance. In terms of electric vehicles I have to say that I am not fond of electric scooters. I don't like how they uh pollute in in a visual sense uh the city. Especially when they were first introduced, people would just leave them everywhere. People often drive them in a hazardous way. I think that they often behave like pedestrians, I don't think they considered that they're actually driving a vehicle. At some point the municipality forbid their use between midnight and six am and there was a big drop in accidents. Further people started to be fined to drive them under the influence of alcohol and the local media talked about this issue quite a lot. So, I think that all of this made people more aware. But I don't recall the municipality running any awareness campaign in general about transport, sustainability or safety. I remember seeing only some communication campaigns produced by the public transport company about having new electric buses. Going back to cycling, I don't normally use my electric bike in the winter. The reason is first, safety, I think that is slippery in the winter but secondly, it's also to avoid the inconvenience of having to change the tyres to winter tyres. Finally, it's also a matter of preserving the bike. In winter with the salt and everything it rusts quicker. And also I don't want to bike in minus ten or minus five.

I think Oslo is progressing in terms of bike friendliness. There are a lot of bike paths and designated areas where you can uh bike. That being said, I feel a little bit more unsafe than when I biked in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, I had the feeling that all car drivers knew that bikes could come out of anywhere at any time, so I had the feeling that they were more aware of bikes coming from everywhere. Also what I really liked in the Netherlands, which I haven't seen many places, is the fact that in a crossroad, when you're driving on a bike, you get a few seconds head start into the crossing so that you would be more or less through the cross road before you would have the cars coming, so I always felt safer because of that. And I'm missing a little bit is also to have like a safe parking space for bikes in terms of not risking that your bike will get stolen. If I would have to leave my bike for long periods parked in the centre, I wouldn't bring it. There were even accidents at the bike terminal and stories of vans coming and loading the most expensive bikes. So that's a pity because I would use my bike more often otherwise. At work is safe because we have a basement where we can lock them. It is annoying the pricing of public transport. Whether I take only the boat and then I cycle or whether I use only public transport I still pay the same amount for my monthly subscription. Actually when I take the bike on the boat I should pay an extra, which is the equivalent of the ticket for a child. I don't do it, nobody does but I should. So if I relive the public transport using for a part of my journey the bike, I might spend more. But there were some complaints by the boat passengers immediately after a reopening of society after Covid, because everyone were on their bikes because they didn't want to use public transportation and there were so many bikes on the deck that it felt a little bit unsafe uh for the passengers. So, I think that there will be an issue of capacity in the years to come.

Aside from these issues, I think that Oslo could be more sustainable in its mobility if there were less cars in the city centre so this would become more attractive to bikes.

Quotes



it is in theory actually more expensive to bring uh your bike on the boat, because you're supposed to pay a kids fare on the boat for your bike. No one does. Uh. But in theory it means that if I wanted to go legally, I should actually pay like a kids subscription to uh for my bike.

Where the boat leaves from here locally, there are incidents and stories of people coming with the vans and taking the most expensive bikes with them. So that's uh that's a pity. I think. Because then I uh, I would use the bike more often, I think, but now I only use it whenever I'm going to work because of this uh a basement where I where I can leave it.

Keywords

Cycling, commuting, long commute, multimodal transport, safety

RL8_GR01, Greece, Municipality support for sustainable senior transportation

Narrative

I am a 76-year-old woman, living in the area of Stavroupoli in Thessaloniki. After Covid, I felt scared to move by bus or meet my friends and family as I usually did before the pandemic. My daughter, my brother and my grandchildren helped me quarantine by buying me groceries and leaving the bags outside my door during the first year. Now almost 3 years after the first quarantine, I still avoid crowds and when I go to the local open markets I always protect myself and walk around the areas with fewer people. To go outside, for example to visit a doctor, I am always going by taxi to not use public transportation. I am still scared but I protect myself as much so I can and run my errands. Before covid, I would use the bus without hesitation, for example, to come to our summer house in Asprovalta if there weren't any friends or relatives to assist me with their cars. My brother who has his own car always helped me move around. Every Monday him and I went to the market, always using two masks to be safe. If I needed to go somewhere further away I abstained from going completely. Also, my friends are always trying to help me. I don't mind walking but I am scared of stray dogs and I always want to have company, but nevertheless, I don't prefer it despite my good friends, aged 65 and 72, being willing to come with me. So, if we want to spend time together we visit each other's homes and rarely go out. When it comes to other sustainable ways of transportation, elderly people cannot use a bicycle for further destinations. We don't have any other way but to use a car or taxi. Locals usually take their car any chance they get because it is easier and faster. Perhaps the municipality can add extra buses that make small routes

around Stavroupoli, so the elderly can move around easily and sustainably. Also, this might help to decrease the crowd on public transportation. The only action of the municipality has done so far is to provide free transportation with a bus every Saturday to the cemeteries. But even this free route, is so time-restricting that cannot be efficiently used by the elders. There are some electric scooters and I have seen some people use it but the people carry this ideology that this is only used by elders with disabilities. I asked my husband to buy a tricycle but he didn't think it was a good idea because of its weight. An elderly person cannot use a bicycle in the city because the road infrastructures are poor and bicycles cannot coexist with the fast-moving vehicles. This is the most important issue in Greece when it comes to transportation. Another is the governmental supports for citizens' sustainable development. For example, when it comes to recycling there are not enough recycling bins and not in every space where the rest of the bins are. So for the near future, since there are not any other options, I will have to other be assisted by someone with a car or worst-case scenario use the bus. Perhaps, the municipality could add more buses, stops and routes to further destinations.

Quotes

After Covid, I felt scared to move by bus or meet my friends and family as I usually did before the pandemic.

Before Covid, I would use the bus without hesitation, for example, to come to our summer house in Asprovalta if there weren't any friends or relatives to assist me with their cars.

An elderly person cannot use a bicycle in the city because the road infrastructures are poor and bicycles cannot coexist with the fast-moving vehicles.

Keywords

Poor public transportation and road infrastructure, age-related transportation issues, municipality's support

RL8_GR02, Greece, Cost-effective white taxis or buses for individuals with disabilities.

Narrative



I am 27 years old and I have spinal muscular atrophy, which is a genetic condition that makes the muscles weaker and causes problems with movement. It is a common condition, with 1 to 20 children being born with this condition. I move with a wheelchair at all times, both electric and manual. I also own a car that is specific to my needs, which I avoid as it is a bit difficult to use. Since I stay in the area of Kato Toumpa I am able to move around with my electric wheelchair. Due to covid, I stopped moving around as much and I couldn't exercise and go to my daily practice which is very important for me. After a while, the government made some new instructions which allowed me to go but made it very expensive to do so; 400 euros for 10 sessions/month due to the cost of rapid tests. When the vaccinations started to be distributed it became much easier. Other than that, when it comes to transportation, I believe most people with disabilities don't use a car, as it is not as easy as an able-bodied individual. Also, it is more expensive to modify the car, as all expenses for the equipment needed are paid by the individual with disabilities. The only financial assistance is a small tax decrease in traffic charges and customs clearance if you buy a new car. When it comes to the electric wheelchair it's generally very efficient because the battery life is very specific and the cost of recharging is very low compared to bigger electric vehicles. It is helping me be independent as I can use it for as long as 40-45 km. The only other option for me, for further destinations, is the car which I don't prefer as I always need someone to help me and it's more expensive. When it comes to public transportation, I also rarely use it because of the poor infrastructure. I have travelled to many countries and for example, most European metro stations do not have proper access for people with disabilities. When I was younger, I used buses sometimes but only because I had friends that helped me get on the bus despite not having ramps. Also, it depends on the manufacturer of the vehicles; others are less convenient, more expensive etc. The ideal transportation option for people with disabilities is the white taxi, which is extremely expensive especially compared to typical taxis. Unfortunately, in disability, you can't use more sustainable methods at the moment. Some other options are specific buses provided by the Thessaloniki Urban Transport Organisation or the municipality with specific time schedules, which unfortunately are very old and damaged. Furthermore, because they try to assist a lot of people in one day the schedule of the bus is not always time-efficient for each one. If a person with disabilities lives way further away from the centre of the city it is way more difficult. I also face a lot of social discrimination which makes it difficult to create room for discussion. The company I work in allows me to still work remotely since they know my situation and they do not have any option to ease my transportation. When it comes to travelling, I always have to educate myself before I go to a specific country about the options I will have there and if public transport is accessible. In Greece, the constructions of ramps and pavements are so poor that I have to endanger myself and move through the street. I believe that we are living through a transitional period, regarding the decrease in energy consumption. The government is trying to give some allowances to move towards green options like the electric car, but personally, for me, it's still not an option. But I think we should focus this change on public transportation. There is already a plan to create a bike path in certain areas of the city. But we need to have trams, electric buses, and surveillance for double parking or illegal parking in spaces for individuals with disabilities.

Quotes



When it comes to transportation, I believe most people with disabilities don't use a car, as it is not as easy as an able-bodied individual.

I also face a lot of social discrimination which makes it difficult to create room for discussion.

Unfortunately, in disability, you can't use more sustainable methods at the moment.

Keywords

Electric vehicles provide independence, ramps and improved infrastructure, street surveillance

RL8_GR03, Greece, Proximity to work and means of transportation.

Narrative

I am 47 years old. I live here in the Upper Town of Thessaloniki. I recently moved here, and I wanted a house in this area because it's not far from the centre so I can walk around. At the same time, it fulfils the criteria of not having commotion. All these years before, I lived and worked in the Axios Delta, as I told you and for years I had to move by car there, this was also a problem financially and of course, it is understood that you produce the corresponding monoxides and dioxides and so on. In previous years I lived there in Halastra, so my job was very close, so that was easy, but I had to commute to the city for my social life. So, I came to the city to have the second part easier, and I have generally solved this. I rarely take a taxi, almost never, the bus never, always by foot. Sometimes I may have to drive to the Centre for some work or whatever, but generally, I walk, and the good thing is from the last year and so on we are coworking remotely. Therefore, if I go to the office once a week, I do not contribute enough to the greenhouse effect. It gets tiring sometimes working from home but the conditions are not good to go back to the office, being in a room with other colleagues, who talk on the phone etc. But it's different compared to staying at home and everything seems perpetuated. If we compare it to the problem caused by industry and other sectors, the effect of my commute seems insignificant. The same goes for waste production. You can say the same thing about everything in general. So, I think everyone should do their part. Before I moved to the centre, I had to drive around 12 km every day, which was also tiring. In the foreground was the need to reduce costs and fatigue, and this was a very important part. I didn't want to travel so much every day and then have to get out to go somewhere and get back in

the car, it seemed tragic to me. But that it's a factor I think about, to use the car less and produce fewer greenhouse gases, I think about it. Right now I am living the ideal situation for me, living in the centre and not using my car. It would be nice if there was a way of easier access to my workplace so that I could go more often and do it in an easier and more sustainable way, which is not to take a car. I think that if something is pushing people to make these kinds of changes, is convenience, but for me the personal cost and benefit, at the level of environmental awareness. I think the process is extremely slow in all areas, not only in this, but in everything else, and in general, I am not particularly optimistic about this. I think we're heading for disaster, I don't know. In essence, only necessity pushes people to take radical measures and change their habits. And at this level, a change of habits will surely take place in the world. If we get to a more critical point where we see the world coming, upside down, maybe more essential measures will be imposed from the top down, but it won't be because the world would have chosen them in a conscious way. And beyond that, what I cannot understand why we do not do it, is the system of education that is aimed simply at courses that provide you with some knowledge and should be aimed at more meaningful courses, which will have to do with respect in the public space, with environmental awareness, empathy, information, and not just in optional programs that we participate.

Quotes

I rarely take a taxi, almost never, the bus never, always by foot.

So, I think everyone should do their part.

Before I moved to the centre I had to drive around 12 km every day, which was also tiring.

Keywords

Walking, working remotely, poor office conditions, reducing cost and fatigue, top-down transition, educational courses

RL8_GR04, Greece, Issues of transition to sustainable mobility in family systems.

Narrative



I am a 44-year-old woman with two children. I live in Toumpa and I work in the centre. I would not say that my transport is very environmentally friendly, being a motorbike that runs on gas and is twenty years old. The ideal would be something electric I think something like an electric bike, but I am comfortable with this solution.

I only use my bicycle when the motorbike breaks down. And there is the cost, of course, because it crossed my mind now that it is constantly breaking down to change to electric, but the cost is a little prohibitive. A family of four cannot travel long distances in an electric car. There is also public transport but it is a hassle by train or by bus. I'm generally open to cycling and walking. But the electric scooters, I find them very dangerous, because I have an image of the reality of the streets. I would very much like to give it a try with electric vehicles but I give it some time for the prices to come down a little and see in terms of damage what is happening. I do a lot of itineraries because of the children and their activities but only with the motorbike. I don't drive a car. I refuse. It's an easy option though. The car is used by my husband because of his job. We have a car, a motorbike and 4 bicycles. I can't stand the bus, it gets on my nerves. I can't start my day like this, especially after covid. Because there's too much grumbling, too much misery, too much traffic, too much waiting. You're wasting too much of your life waiting. Maybe at some point when the metro starts operating, I might use it but I do not know if it will be convenient in terms of stations how it will be in the neighbourhoods etc. In Athens, the Metro is fine, I recently went and we did not move our car. We parked our car and took the subway wherever we wanted. I think distances can be walked here. Toumpa where we live is an area that is very close to the centre. It's 40 minutes of walking, which I see as exercise.

I don't use a taxi so my choice is always the motorbike. Lately, the gas has gone up, it has a big cost, especially if you make routes outside the prefecture, as we had in recent years with the husband who went to schools outside Thessaloniki. The cost was very high but in general, the car is a medium that we do not use especially during the week. The motorbike we have come to share. Now the cost is the fuel, and the maintenance because it is very old, it brings a lot of problems, we solve them with patents. You give a lot of money, but it is in the context of the general increase in prices that exist. If I don't urge my child to take the bus and urge him to take the bike or walk, I imagine this will somehow be etched into him and he will seek to do so. I think it's a bit of a habit how you have it in your everyday life. When I was a kid, I didn't have a bike. There was a car in the family. We didn't really walk distances, take the bus or take a taxi. These are habits that I acquired when I was weaned and I decided what I would do with my life. So, I think a seed goes in, but from then on it's also a matter for everyone to decide how to move. That is, there are times when the motorbike does not start when it rains, and I get off on foot. I have learned that way now and I feel like I can't move with something else. With the motorbike in whatever weather it does you get it and it is compared to other means more economical. Subsidies have been given I think for the electrics, ok, some things are being done. Now I don't know what more could be done. surely it's not just about moving, it's where you're going to leave it etc. There is no care, something has to be done en masse to have a serious impact. Of course, it is important and crucial to do something because things go from bad to worse. I don't know how we're going to be in terms of climate, let's say ten years from now. I'm already seeing changes compared to 15 years ago. Very big changes and very extreme things happening that didn't happen before. So, it means something is not being done right. There needs to be something organised and massively targeted in

the world. There is caution on my part about what may happen in the future with these electrics and what they may do, what damage it may take you and how much it may cost you. Again, back to the financial issues. I also want and try to be independent as much as I can, not rely on someone else to move. There are various aspects that affect this whole thing and I try not to burden the environment as much as I can anyway.

Quotes

The ideal is something like an electric bike.

Lately, the gas has gone up, it has a big cost, especially if you make routes outside the prefecture.

Something has to be done en masse to have a serious impact.

Keywords

Extreme environmental changes, financial issues, family, vehicle fuel & maintenance, poor public transportation

RL8_GR05, Greece, Electric scooter and appropriate supporting infrastructure.

Narrative

I live near the centre of Thessaloniki and I also work in the centre, so the distances I do daily are about five kilometres. That's why I use a scooter, which is electric and does not pollute the environment. Yes, it uses energy, electricity and all that, but it's definitely a step better than the motorbike. So, my main means of transportation is the scooter and before it was the bike. And when it rained, I used the bus. So much for the moving part. I also have a car, but I do not use it in the city just to get down for a coffee, I will use it for longer distances or if I need to go to the supermarket to carry some things. If I could get an electric one I would. I use a scooter but the city doesn't have many bike paths. I travel about 2 kilometres until I find the first bike path. Of course, I'm nervous, if a car comes out on the left because the bike path is up, it's side by side with the roads that pass and they don't look at you they come out like that. So, I have to keep an eye out. And then the path stops again, so from the 6 kilometres I travel a day it has only for the 3. The other 3km is

through straits, here and there. Ideally, I would like this to be done differently. It is something that, at the moment, cannot happen. They have to start slowly, in other things, and get there as well. But already the part with the cars has taken on some dimensions of evolution. A lot of electric cars have started coming out. Now they're putting out chargers and stuff. The part of teleworking has developed much more, this means that many people no longer move and work from home, so fewer movements. This may be positive in terms of pollutants, but in other areas, there is a problem. Psychologically, people who are locked in homes work remotely. And it can be long hours in the house, not socialising. If it rains, I'll take the bus. I would like at some point to see the municipality make a good bike path and a charging station for electric vehicles. If we do these things it will help with traffic jams, the appeal of all these pollutants that are in the centre and I also think that people will be happier because they will not have such a stressed way of moving around. When I happened to get a chance to get a scooter, I liked it. I saw how handy it is and how fast I can move, so I prefer it. Maybe I like to try new things, especially when something gets better. Especially the time-efficiency aspect. I just saw that with this scooter I have gained a lot of time. I'm not changing it. This affected my way of thinking; mobility, diet etc. In general, if a person starts thinking regarding evolution, at some point he ends up doing this as well. So, all this will have to pass a little in philosophy and culture to know it. So, let's start thinking about getting electric scooters, going out, getting to know them and then choosing them. People will see with time, how fast it is, how easy to use, and by extension to all that it is environmentally friendly.

Quotes

I use a scooter, which is electric and does not pollute the environment.

I travel about 2 kilometres until I find the first bike path.

I would like at some point to see the municipality make a good bike path and a charging station for electric vehicles.

Keywords

Electric vehicles, dangerous roads, bike paths, traffic jams, time efficiency, charging stations

RL8_GR06, Greece, Invisible mobility issues and public transport



Narrative

I am 27 years old, I am an architect, I have been living in Thessaloniki for the last few years and my origin is Larissa. I work in an office in Aristotelous Square and live in Efkleidis. I use the bus on 90% of my trips, due to the distance it would not be environmentally sustainable to use a car. I have had a problem with my knees since birth, I had to have some surgery. Clearly, the condition has improved but still, some pain remains and it is difficult to walk. For example, a walkable distance of 30' for someone else for me is very difficult, such as of course stairs, ascents, etc. There are no other means in Thessaloniki other than the bus but fortunately, the line that suits me for work is relatively frequent. However, no one guarantees me that I will find a seat and because of my young age no one offers me one, so I am forced to stay upright which causes me severe pain that persists throughout the day. At some point I had been looking to buy an electric bike or scooter, to be more independent in my commute, as it has happened due to the traffic and the delay of the bus to be late for my work. Unfortunately, however, I did not find any funding so that I could make this purchase without having to pay too much as I am a new professional and do not have the appropriate salary. Although I have access to the buses, it could be improved for example in the old buses the steps are quite high so if there were ramps or additional lower steps it would be easier for me. Also, access to proper bike lanes on the city's road network is absent, something I thought about when I wanted to get an electric vehicle. In the first quarantine, we worked exclusively remotely, so for me, it was ideal as I did not have to move. In the second quarantine after some time, we began to go some days to the office when the measures relaxed a little, and then the situation on the buses was a little more humane. I don't know, I think it was a little more often and they were less crowded, so I would find a seat every day. But then you understand that as soon as the measures were taken, we returned to the situation that you and I have been experiencing with the buses for so many years. The scooter is clearly more sustainable than the car, as well as the bus. So, if I could I'd like to use it at some point. What I think could be done by the Municipality of Thessaloniki is to make a more efficient network of bicycle paths. It is dangerous to ride a scooter or bicycle right now. So far, I see that the bike path, the most organised and delimited, is on Nikis Avenue and Nea Paralia. In the short term it may seem to us that if only I let's say start riding a scooter, using my bike more will not help, but if we look at it in the long term we see that carbon dioxide emissions are reduced by a lot, it is a much more convenient way to travel for everyone and in big cities like Thessaloniki. It's convenient for both parking and commuting, so I think it becomes more humane. Imagine that then the noise of honking, and traffic jams decreases and the time you need to go to work respectively becomes less. So I think yes, it's very important. I have two colleagues who live in Kalamaria, so they use a car. A colleague of mine, however, stays in Proxenou Koromila, so she comes on foot. My employers now use a car for other reasons because they might have a business appointment or go to a construction site, so you know. The bus in Thessaloniki, at least with the frequency and accuracy of the routes it has now, would be horrible. I can say that it is something that was cultivated for me in school because respect for the environment is not something that is limited only to transport, but it also concerns the design of buildings, and the design of public spaces, so as an architect it concerns me, so you understand that I cannot respect the environment in one aspect of my daily life and not in another. Larissa is clearly smaller than Thessaloniki, so you understand that there

the distances are shorter so the car as a family we used mainly for transportation when it rained or for some excursions etc. In the city, because I live in the centre, I never had to say that I would use a car. I think it's important both as citizens and as people that we respect the planet and leave a good legacy for future generations. If the situation remains as it is with the buses and all that we discussed before, I believe that definitely, the pain in my knees will get worse if anything. I hope it will improve, so we will not have to look at this unpleasant and pessimistic scenario. If the subway is built, everything will be better. Whenever it starts operating, it will be convenient for me because my house is directly opposite, I think that the traffic will be a little decongested because the metro routes will be more frequent, as it is a means of the fixed track, so I think everything will be better. A metro or a means of fixed track or tram which I think the trams operate electrically if I am not mistaken, so they are environmentally friendly and help to decongest the incredible traffic we see in the buses of OASTH and the traffic in general on the roads. So, you understand the impact on the environment would be much smaller. It would be very good if the road of Thessaloniki was changed and paved better. And of course, not only for me but for all the drivers of Thessaloniki. Because I think that for vehicle drivers too, the road surface is often bad. And then I'm going to say something trivial that you may have heard. I have heard it from many of the passengers of the OASTH. There should be some more frequent and expensive itineraries because of covid and for people not only with mobility like me who have some mobility problems, people who are in a wheelchair are even worse than me in their daily life, the situation in OASTH is unacceptable. And I think that not only the frequency of routes should be changed, but it should also take care of the modernisation of its vehicles. Because it is inconceivable that buses of the 80s still run, which clearly had no regard for people with a wheelchair, pregnant women or for people with limited mobility, there should be some ramps on OASTH buses or lower stairs. I think these are some small steps that are not particularly costly and improve the daily life of all the citizens of Thessaloniki.

Quotes

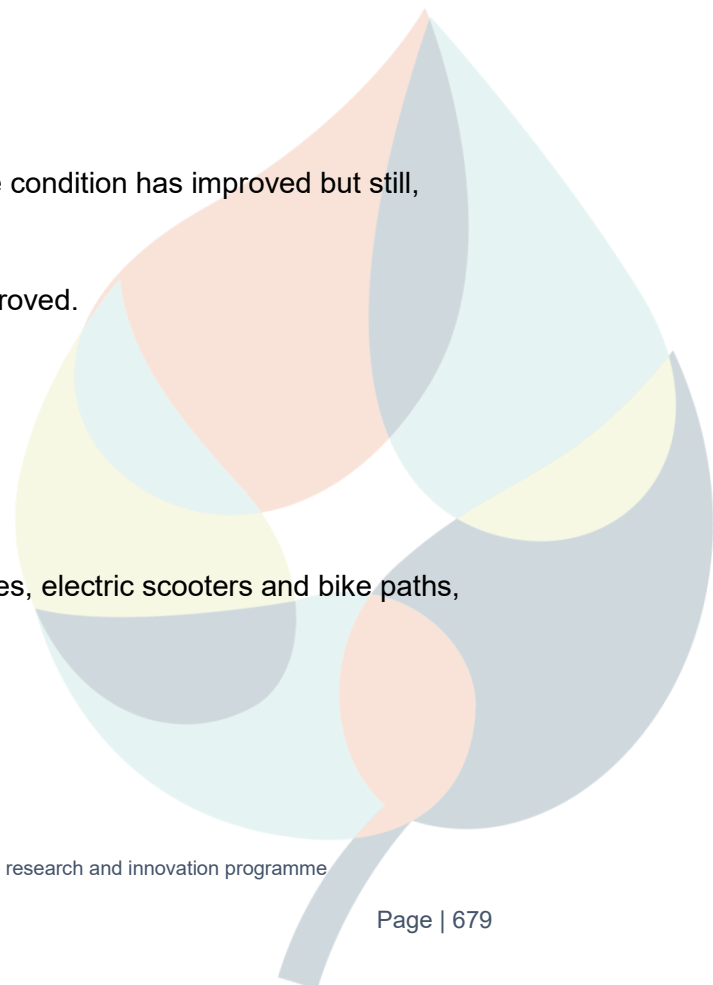
I have had a problem with my knees since birth...the condition has improved but still, some pain remains and it is difficult to walk.

Although I have access to the buses, it could be improved.

If the subway is built, everything will be better.

Keywords

Mobility issues, frequency and modernization of buses, electric scooters and bike paths, sustainable transport



RL8_GR07, Greece, Mobility issues due to disability and isolation.

Narrative

I am 28 years old, I finished applied informatics and now I work in a company as a programmer. I have quadriplegia after an accident I had when I was 15 years old from diving in the sea and from that period onwards I move using a wheelchair. Now I use the wheelchair for short distances and for longer distances by car and very rarely the means. I live in Kato Toumba in Thessaloniki. I won't say that the movement after the coronavirus has been affected, it remains the same. The same difficulties I face as before. Near my house, we have a bus stop right outside the apartment complex actually and in the 10 years I am living here I have used it 10 times. I think that says it all. It's a total emergency option and I'm avoiding it. Usually, I move through the streets because as you know the sidewalks either do not have ramps or they have on one side and on the other side you are in a dead end. Also, they might be very narrow or the tiles are cut off from the roots of the trees that are planted. In the past, I used a service from the municipality of Thessaloniki to take me to the university. I used this service until before the coronavirus to go to the office in the Phoenix Centre, which is under the Palataki. After the coronavirus, I work 100% from home. We closed because of the first lockdown as all companies because it was mandatory. Then in the second one, we started again little by little to go up to 50%, some days remote, others online. Now my team is going back to the office twice a week. Of course, I stay at home because now I have a medical issue. I have an infection, so I haven't gone back yet. I believe that as soon as this is over I shall go twice a week with the rest of them. It is difficult most days to go and find parking for the car in the centre. It actually takes hours to get there if it's somewhere around 8 o'clock. This is also part of everyday life. Regarding buses, there is definitely a possibility to use them and they are equipped. The bus that is convenient for me is equipped, it has a ramp inside. Just one time it happened not to open. At other times the driver did not know what to do with the ramp. Fortunately, I take it at the beginning of the route of the line and when I get on there were not a lot of people. It has happened to me, to get on a bus, that is almost full and the people do not move, to step aside to get to that corner that is for wheelchairs. Also, a lot of times the buses are damaged. For these reasons I avoid it and whenever I have to I use the car. I don't have the need to use it yet. Lately, I've got an electric scooter, but I haven't used it yet. I got that so I can move around on my own because out there I need help without one. The roads are not all flat as they are in various European countries. With it, I'll be able to go for a walk to the beach on my own and get back on my own without needing any help. I'll need help just to button it up and get out. There is a way to get it through a fund, but I got it privately with my own money. If I used it then I wouldn't be able for the next five years to make a purchase for another wheelchair. So, I didn't want to risk that. We are a big city and we only have buses, we don't have anything else.

And the subway that will become might not assist a lot of people as it doesn't go through many areas. It will help but in my opinion, there could be a tram in the centre, let's say it goes around from the universities to go all the way around the coast. It would take so much of a load from the gusts with all that fuel. A lot of people have no choice; they take their car. Personally, if I had a second and a third option for public transportation, I'd be better. I think it has to do with education and personal ideology but also with the world. People should know how to act when a person with a wheelchair gets on the bus, from the driver who should know how it works, how the components work, how to get off the ramp and all those who use the bus have to step aside to go in the wheelchair space to sit down before the driver starts and starts while we are on the move and bump into each other. So, education, I think, is a big part. For me, definitely be able to use the sidewalk and be safe too. Everything needs to be fixed; sidewalks, ramps, all that. But that's difficult. For example, in my neighbourhood, they have a big street Amphipoleos, which 6 months ago, was repaved. Before this happened, I had to get down to the road, which also has potholes. When the sidewalk was repaved, the time to get to the centre was reduced, but it's still not quite right. I believe that people, when infrastructure is improved, people with disabilities will use it more and more and others will adapt and understand. Well, certainly people get educated from school, but also from their parents. Here in my neighbourhood, before I came here there was a ramp under my apartment building, which was always blocked. Someone would park their car. Over time, after a couple of months of seeing me, it got more and more sparse. Okay, now it's been a long time for someone to park, but it doesn't happen overnight. Look, What I'm saying is that I've been to some foreign countries, I've been to Germany, to Berlin, to Switzerland. The only thing that changes is the infrastructure. As soon as there is an environment that is accessible to everyone, everyone uses it. That's good. And the world is familiar with it. So, you see that you go to get on the bus and the passengers know how things work and they help you. In general, this is the main topic.

Quotes

I use the wheelchair for short distances and for longer distances by car and very rarely the means.

Near my house, we have a bus stop right outside the apartment complex actually and in the 10 years I am living here I have used it 10 times.

After the coronavirus, I work 100% from home.

Everything needs to be fixed; sidewalks, ramps, all that.

Keywords

Quadriplegia, damaged buses, poor pavement condition, education

RL8_GR08, Greece, The issue of work-home commute

Narrative

I am 26 years old, and I come from a middle-class family. I work in Efkarpia and work in Stavroupoli. And that's my main problem. To get to work, I use public transport, specifically the bus. I do not like that, according to the environmental cost it has, but unfortunately, I have no other option at the moment. I am against the many pollutants that the buses produce, especially those used by Thessaloniki because they are so old. Now they start bringing in some new ones but the situation has not improved much. So far with the buses, I would like to be able to have other options but for various reasons, there are no options, such as the bike. I love the bike, and it does not bother me to cycle even in light rain or in the cold, but as is known the infrastructure in Thessaloniki does not exist. It is extremely dangerous on the road. I tried it for a few years but there were a lot of risks, really a lot of risks, so I stayed using the bus. Also, even better would be an electric skate or electric scooter, but unfortunately at the moment they are quite expensive and are not in my budget. Apart from shopping, I have some shops in my area and some supermarkets for everyday shopping. By bus 90%, at some point, I may share a car with someone from my neighbourhood who wants to go down there and will be able to assist me. Unfortunately, we have only one bus and the routes have been decreased, so it serves only very early in the morning the children who go to school, and again at noon when it starts again. From then on at best you have to wait 20 minutes at the stop and if it is on time which very often is not. In terms of people until the end of 2019 at peak times obviously, it was full, there were cases when you would have to wait for the next bus because the people did not fit, but from 2019 onwards with the start of the coronavirus, the truth is that it was even more difficult to choose to take a bus because you understand that there are no options so as carefully as possible always with a mask and not to lean on each other, especially at peak times. Only in the time when it was forbidden to move, then I started walking sometimes, towards Stavroupoli mainly, but it is not practical because it is a long distance. There is only one gasoline scooter that my mother generally uses to go back and forth to work so I can't use it on a daily basis for sure. I am waiting for an opportunity maybe and probably it will be for all the above reasons, it will definitely be convenient because I will not have to wait for a late bus. The issue of consciousness of course exists within the environment and the difference between the electric skate with the bike is the speed because with the electric skate you can develop a speed that is appropriate for the road and is a little safer than the bike, so yes, the electric skate is definitely a good solution for me. For me, without having done some in-depth research about it, it would definitely make a difference, even the slightest difference that anyone can make I think is good. And I and my sister who lives with my mother go back and forth on the bus and my mother on the motorbike. The bus was basically not an option it was a

need, so since I went to school I used the bus, from high school even because I did not go to my area school I went to another area, so growing up I had no choice it was only the bus. The environmental part is clearly of my own consciousness, that is, my parents and grandparents had no idea what they are causing to the environment, nor were they ever interested, but I was growing up at a time when the environmental part had already become a huge issue and especially with the gas emissions from the vehicles and not only because the vehicles are probably the smallest of the factories and all that, but we cannot make any change in it. So yes, the change that I would like to make is only in the electric skate, not to offer on the bus, to something that in my ethics is not good. At the first opportunity, I will buy either a skate or a scooter whatever I can, it's just a matter of money. It's a lot of expenses with the house etc, it's a little difficult only from an economic point of view. In the near future, since my work is quite stable, I want to believe that the only difference will be if I manage to own an electric vehicle, whatever it is, until then, unfortunately, I will have to use the transport of OASTH. Everyone needs to see for themselves what they really need, let's say there are many who use their car for distances that they do not need, that is, to go 1 kilometre away, to have a coffee anything you do not need to take the car I believe. That is, the changes that can be made are small but important if they are made by everyone, they must make a reflection on themselves and their needs to reduce at least to a minimum the use of gasoline and diesel so that there are not so large emissions. Then in terms of infrastructure certainly the state could finally make a bicycle path, I believe that we differ from the other central European countries in this issue in that most people use the bicycle in terms of infrastructure, but we have not learned that the bike can go out on the road because it is dangerous, but maybe the state should, I believe at least, took care to make paths. Then people would use it much more because anyway we live in a time when there is a crisis in energy and fuel, so even unintentionally the average person I think would think much more about getting a bike either electric or manual to do their daily commutes. From a family perspective, I had no issue, some acquaintances mock the issue because let's say e.g. they say that with this money I could get a motorbike or an old car, but my point is not only to be comfortable or to go faster maybe, the point is to be able to do my job without having the burden on my conscience that I am doing harm to the environment because what we will leave behind us in the next generations is first of all the world we live in, the earth, the environment. I do not want to contribute to this whole situation. Certainly, the roads for cars do not even make let alone for an electric scooter which has small wheels, it is not protected from anywhere, but again I personally am willing to risk it within the infrastructure we said before the state, it is very basic and the roads, beyond the bicycle path, are also the roads. But unfortunately, it is known it is not some secret, that most streets in Greece I can say but I will at least talk about my city Thessaloniki, it is difficult.

Quotes

To get to work, I use public transport, specifically the bus...I have no other option at the moment.

It is extremely dangerous on the road.



I do not want to contribute to this whole situation.

Keywords

Electric scooter, walking, crowded bus, poor infrastructure, finances

RL8_GR09, Greece, Senior mobility and walking

Narrative

I am a retired teacher, aged 65, and I live in Terpsithea Stavroupoli, Pavlos Melas. Usually, when I want to go down to the centre I go on foot, this helps me in a lot of ways like staying healthy. When I return, I take the bus but generally, I try to go on small routes so I am always on foot without using the bus. In laiki and Ampelokipi where I go for a walk and in Evosmos I go on foot and return on foot when the routes are small. That is, when I want to go to the supermarket I go on foot, I don't even carry a stroller, I just go with a few things so as not to be loaded. When I want to pay bills and so on I walk again in Ampelokipous and I do not use transportation. For leisure reasons, I go by bus usually, in Ioannina where is my origin I go by bus and return by bus. They serve me in the area where I live, the issue is that they do not come on time and when they come they are full. And in terms of exercise, that is, when I worked at school, I went on foot to my school, while there was a bus to go for two or three stops but the time I would wait for it was more than walking that distance. But for exercise, for health issues let's say, I mostly walk. Maybe in the centre of Thessaloniki people should not move by car, and use public transport, because in the centre the traffic is terrible. I do not know how it will be solved, maybe with the metro. I do not use a car, but I sometimes find it difficult on buses because of the crowds and the delay. With Covid while I would walk to the beach in the summers and winter and so on, I stopped going, because of the measures. I always wear a mask inside the bus while quite a majority do not wear a mask and are on top of each other. I am not afraid of anything in terms of security while walking and at night I have not been attacked so far. I have been walking for years, since I retired, from 55 onwards, I have been walking for a decade. And before I walked but only in the summers, when I worked. And my husband usually goes on foot to the beach every day in the afternoon and goes by car with our son. It is good for people to gather and go down in the same car, for example, a mother with her daughter, when they want to go to the market with one car and not with two. There should not be many cars specifically in the centre, but there should also be bicycle paths, for people who want to use a bike or a scooter as I see lately. With the electric skates, there should be a special road, however, that does not

bother even the buses, as the buses are not disturbed in their operation. It may have puzzled me because, the drivers of the cars do not pay attention, of course, the drivers of the skates should also have a helmet and have a special uniform to be seen from afar, so both the drivers of the cars and the drivers of the skates or bicycles should pay attention. Bicycle paths could be built and urban transport should be increased and we hope that when the metro is done, a lot of traffic on the streets will go faster and where they want and there will be no pollutants from the cars. It pleases me to walk and for my health, because some health problems exist such as cholesterol, sugar and so on with walking they get a little decreased. But I like to walk at least once a day, I don't like it only when it rains, I can't walk. Generally, in Ioannina where I grew up, I have never taken the bus, always where I went, I went on foot, I never entered public transport since childhood. We went on foot even if it was a long distance the whole family went to Molos let's say on foot, we did not take a taxi or bus, and maybe I learned that from my family.

Quotes

I go by foot, this helps me in a lot of ways like staying healthy.

In the centre the traffic is terrible... it will be solved, maybe with the metro.

I do not use a car, but I sometimes find it difficult on buses because of the crowds and the delay.

Keywords

Safety, Covid, public transport, walking, health issues

RL8_GR10, Greece, Young woman's commute with public transport.

Narrative

I'm 24 years old, I work in a pastry cafe, it's close to home and because I work only morning I always go on foot. I have two other brothers older, two boys. In my everyday life, I move more by bus, and at work, I go on foot, because I told you it's close, but generally I move more by bus. I don't use any other means of transport, even a taxi, but rather a bus. I live and work in Stavroupoli, my job is a quarter from home. Then if I go for

a coffee, near my area, I walk again, otherwise, if I go down to the centre, I choose the bus, and if I have to return very late, I will use a taxi because I may not catch the bus. My father uses the car, I and my brothers still don't. To go down to the centre I might go on foot if the weather is good, but to return at night on foot from the centre is difficult because of the security. Now for the future, I don't think I would use a bicycle, or electric scooter, to tell the truth, I have not thought about it. The house from the bus stop is close, it is a 3-minute walk and there are many buses going through the stop, so it is easy to access. But there are many problems. The issue of schedules, the issue of tickets that have increased for no reason, which is bad and meaningless I would say, but the most important is every time the buses pass, especially afternoons. People go to work so they need frequent transport. Here in Stavroupoli, because a lot of people go down to the centre, it's hard to get on the bus and be on top of each other, so it's a huge problem. Ideally, I would like to have a car, if not a car, something to help the environment a little, let's say a bicycle. So, if it's a short distance away, I'd take my bike, if you go somewhere far away ideally it would be a car. But a car would be better for me because of the safety. Now let's say if I don't live in Stavroupoli and I live somewhere else and my job is a little further away I will need it. And for the supermarket, I will need to take the car for a matter of weight. But we pollute the environment too much. And indeed, the way we move is very bad, a lot of exhaust gas, a lot of gasoline, everything... all this is very bad for the environment, but at some point, it does have to change too. But an electric vehicle, for example, would be costly for me. My dad as I said moves by car, my brothers walk more, and they take a bus, and my mother again takes a bus and walks, there's not much difference in the way we generally move as a family. When I was a little girl, when I had some outside jobs with my parents, we used to take the bus, so I can say that I have been affected a little bit since I was a little girl, but it's still my ideology, so to speak, I want to move either by bus or on foot. Now everything has to change here, mostly the roads. To make the roads so that it is not used either by cars or only by buses, to make a lane either in the middle or at the edge of the streets as they have done on Nikis Avenue, and in general that I see abroad, there are some lanes for buses, and for bicycles and scooters. It would be good to have more bike lanes. Not just some in the centre, but in other areas as well. When I went to school for two years at the east in Pylaia, I had to take a bus from the station, a specific bus and go to the end of Pylaia. And we would always come in and see what time there are schedules and stuff, but they never started on time. That was the worst thing. That is, we could have waited half an hour, or we could have waited a little longer for the bus to start from the end of Pylaia above to leave. It was not close, so it was an experience that I lived through for two years and I do not want to experience this thing again. To wait half an hour for a bus to start and while I am in Pylaia and I have to return to the West Stavroupoli. Ideally, for me, there should be more buses or start on time. There are people who have to go to a job, they don't want to be late. And I am also one of those people who always when I am going somewhere, I start earlier and I always end up being at my appointments earlier, because I have this anxiety of when the bus will pass, what time will it be at the stop, what traffic will I meet on the way? I hope it will change at some point, I hope so.

Quotes

In my everyday life, I move more by bus, and at work, I go on foot.



But a car would be better for me because of the safety.

But an electric vehicle, for example, would be costly for me.

Keywords

Traffic, late buses, pollution, walking, safety, expensive transport

RL8_RO01, Romania, Choosing taxi in times of uncertainty

Narrative

I am a single woman of 48 years old; I work at the university, and I live in the central district of a north-eastern city of Romania. In everyday life I use public transport to go to work when I know that I can fit in time with possible delays.

At these times, I have the possibility to choose between two transport options: either I choose to travel with a bus that has a direct route to the university but it is very crowded and reaches the station with difficulty, or I choose to change two means of transport, two different tram lines. Most of the time, I choose the second option (taxi) because I have more certainty that I can arrive on time. Unfortunately, the road infrastructure of Iasi is quite deficient. Moreover, the neighbourhood in which I live is a central one and located in close proximity to the main train station of the city. So, it is a road junction in this area, most public transport routes transit it. Unfortunately, however, it is also the main street for transit of the city; so, many of the heavy vehicles that transit the city pass through this neighbourhood. Thus, it creates not only extraordinary congestion, hellish traffic, but it is also a high level of pollution – both sound and air. At other times, when I am pressed for time, I choose to travel by taxi. I do not have a driver's license or personal car. That's kind of the route I take when I go to work. When I get back from work, I usually choose to walk. So even if I don't walk to work, most of the time out of a crunch of time, I choose to go back home on foot. And if we are to talk about the way in which I choose my mobility transport for personal purposes, most of the time I choose to go by public transport. Only when I go shopping and come with quite large luggage, I go by taxi, for reasons of comfort. As I said before, the infrastructure – both the road and the one related to logistics, of the means of transport in Iasi is a deficient one. I have a who works at the public transport company of the city and she told me that the problem is not one related to the number of vehicles that the company has, but to the number of employees. People do not want to get hired or give up their job quickly enough because of a

disadvantageous salary system. The problem is, therefore not one that relates only to road infrastructure. Bus stops are quite frequent and in close proximity to me. Now, at bus stops, panels display the time remaining until a means of transport arrives at the station. Unfortunately, they depend on the connection with the GPS of the means of transport and most of the time do not display a correct time. Many times I was in a situation where I had to call a taxi to get to work because I waited at the bus stop for too long, even though the panel display told me that it was about to arrive. Now buses and trams have changed, the car park has improved since the lockdown period. Some of these offer higher comfort compared to the previous ones. Moreover, I noticed that electric means of transport also appeared. I hope that they will provide much more accurate connectivity with the display panels at bus stops, so that I can be sure that I fit in time when needed. During the lockdown period we travelled, most often, when we were allowed to do so, rather by walking or taxi. We avoided public transport because they were a vector of the spread of the disease. Now, however, after the end of the restrictions, we have resumed transport by public transport, even though they are very often crowded. I would like them to be more frequent, so as to ensure a certainty of the achievement of the goal. I believe that all of us can have an impact in terms of reducing greenhouse emissions. I could choose to ride a bike or an electric scooter, but I don't want that, it's not a type of activity I'd like to do, and I don't think we can force people to resort to this kind of behaviour. My parents live in a peri-urban area of Vaslui and they travel, most of the time, by means of public transport. My father walks most often, he is a greener citizen than me. I could say that this preference to travel by public transport has been a learned one since childhood, since my family did not drive by personal car. And most of my friends use public transport, except for those who have larger families or have children that they have to take to various school or extra-school activities. And those who have neither children nor a personal car, use public transport or car sharing options. Also, one of my personal values is the protection of nature. So, I am resorting to public transport and recycling to try to straighten out my behaviour to achieve environmental protection. But often, for safety reasons, they choose to travel by taxi. For example, if I finish classes at university late, I choose to go by taxi because there have been many situations of attack on people at bus stops that are not properly illuminated. However, I like to think that I maintain a balance between these transport alternatives, with a clearer preference towards public transport.

Quotes

Sometimes I choose to travel by taxi for arriving on time,

Some of the bus stations are not safe in night times,

Public transport has significant delays

Keywords

Public transport, panels, safety, certainty, delays



RL8_RO02, Romania, Choosing efficiency in transportation: the use of taxi

Narrative

I am a single woman 35 years old; I live in one of the largest neighbourhoods of a North-Eastern city of Romania, and I am a collaborator in education. The neighbourhood where I live is located in close proximity to the city centre and connects with 4 other neighbourhoods in the vicinity. Before the pandemic, I was living in a central city district and using public transport to move to work. The transport stations were multiple and in my immediate vicinity. Also, there were many transport variants, starting from the bus, tram, and many taxi stops. I lived in that neighbourhood for about 4 years. Later, I moved to the neighbourhood where I currently live. It is one of the largest districts of the city. Since the pandemic period began, I started using the taxi almost daily to move to work. The reasons why we have resorted to this form of transport are manifold. First of all, to get directly to work the only solution was to use the tram. But the tram line we were using comes from an adjacent area of the city and is often crowded. One day, while I was going to work by tram, I was robbed by a group of gypsies. It was very crowded on the bus, yet no one intervened when I realised they had stolen my wallet from my bag. This was the first moment I thought it appropriate to change the means of transport. Secondly, I have an extremely low immune system. Thus, during the pandemic, I avoided not only any form of public transport, but I practiced extreme social isolation. Since the restrictions were lifted, I have had an attempt to use the tram to move to work, but I have noticed that many passengers do not use the protective mask or show clear signs of illness. I was afraid to continue using the tram, so I headed for the taxi. Thirdly, the neighbourhood where I live – even though it is at a distance close to the historical city centre, the distance from the workplace is quite large, about 6 kilometres. The direct tram line to work pretty much surrounds the city to my destination, so I get to travel this distance by tram in 30 minutes. That is after waiting pretty long at the station... there are a series of installed panels that should specify when the means of public transport arrive at the station, but they give approximations, most of the time, erroneous. In order to be sure that I arrive on time, I should leave home about 1 hour early and take the risk of waiting in the cold long enough, or being very crowded and not being able to get on the tram, or the line is blocked and I will not get to the right place, or get sick... these are some of the reasons why I use the taxi to get around. It is, however, quite expensive... a ride from home to work costs almost 5 euros. And my salary is 400 euros. So, monthly you spend almost 100 euros on transport alone. It is very expensive, but I do not see the alternative that suits my needs. And unfortunately, I got used to the level of comfort offered by the taxi. When I ride the tram, it's always crowded, it's late, I have a lot of luggage and it's quite difficult for me to manage the trip from this point of view. And from the pandemic period, I reoriented myself and started using the taxi more. I want to walk more, but unfortunately, the distance from

work is too great. Maybe if I managed to earn more money and be able to take a rent or buy my own home closer to work, I would give up the taxi and walk more or with the electric scooter. I don't know how to ride a bike, I tried to learn and I had negative experiences, I had some pretty strong falls. So I gave up. Plus, the bike lanes in the city are placed on the sidewalk, where pedestrians always go. And there are pretty high risks of injury. I feel quite guilty that I use the car so often, I know it has harmful effects on the environment. That's why I keep trying to compensate for this behaviour through other forms of protecting the environment, such as recycling. I strive to recycle according to the rules, but often there is also a problem with the comfort or ease of doing so. I strive, for example, to collect the batteries and take them to the collection centre. Unfortunately, however, at the collection centre, I also arrive by taxi...

I think I could give up the comfort and efficiency of the taxi if more tram lines were introduced to help me and give me the reassurance that I will not be robbed or that I will get to where I need it on time. However, I think there is still a long way to go.

Quotes

There are a series of installed panels that should specify when the means of public transport arrive at the station, but they give approximations, most of the time, erroneous, When I ride the tram, it's always crowded, it's late, I have a lot of luggage and it's quite difficult for me to manage the trip from this point of view.

Keywords

Inefficient, unsafe, robbery, crowded, taxi

RL8_RO03, Romania, Health issues trump sustainable mobility

Narrative

I am a single woman, 34 years old and I suffer from obesity. I was born in Vaslui County, but for 17 years, I have been living for rent in a north-eastern city of Romania. I attended the courses of the University, and currently, I am a collaborating teacher, teaching students. Now I live in one of the largest districts of the city, close to the central area of the city. Access to the central area is quite easy, it is a reasonably important road point of the city. The whole neighbourhood resembles a small town; there are all facilities in close

proximity to the block where they live. As a rule, I drive by taxi to work and walk shopping; the shops are pretty close to me. The decision to use mainly taxi for travel came during the pandemic period. My mother is sick with cancer, and she comes to the city every month to the Regional Institute of Oncology to undergo treatment. Her immune system is extremely low, being susceptible to getting sick quickly. So, during the pandemic period, I preferred to use a taxi for travel.

For every course of treatment, I accompany my mother to the hospital, and I don't want to expose her to situations that could worsen her health.

This initiative has been promoted over time, even now when the restrictions are lifted. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I used public transport very often, mainly the tram to take me to work or for other social activities. But we've had several unpleasant events. Twice my phone was stolen, once from my bag and another time from my coat pocket. Most of the time it is incredibly crowded, which allows many criminals to take advantage of people's inattention. Also, I have been the target of personal attacks from other travellers a few times, given my physical situation. I have been put in many unpleasant situations, to receive insults and insults from other travellers and physical attacks from people of another ethnicity. Moreover, the means of public transport are outdated, and the platforms of the transport stations are not adapted. Thus, I was often put in a situation where I could not get on the tram, the distance between the step of the platform and that of the tram was much too high. I also have problems with my knees, I cannot stand up for a long time and I cannot do sustained physical exertion. That's why I have difficulty traveling the distance of about 5 kilometres from home to work on foot or using a bike. I want to use a more sustainable means of transport, but unfortunately, my resources are limited. Even so, the financial effort to use the taxi every day puts its mark on financial security. However, due to a lack of time but also of financial and personal resources, I cannot afford to ride the tram or on foot to work. But when I move for personal purposes, for example, shopping, I walk. As I mentioned, the neighbourhood where I live offers all the facilities in the geographical proximity. I could only walk to work if I was closer to work, say, 1.5 to 2 kilometres from it. But under these conditions, I can't. However, I also make a cost-benefit calculation: if I used public transport or walked, I would save money, but I would lose time and endanger my physical and emotional health and integrity, respectively. So, the drugs cost more than the taxi. This is probably a rationalization on my part, but I prefer to sacrifice other outings in the city or other types of enjoyable activities for this, for the taxi. Because I prefer this level of safety and comfort, to use the car on a daily basis, I have remorse about the impact I have on the environment. I would like to use public transport more, but the road and fleet infrastructure does not help me. I would like the trams to be more numerous, to come more often, and to have a clear transport schedule to de-stress the congestion. In addition, I would love to walk more, I realise that the period of restrictions has made me more sedentary, which is not good. But I can't even travel a long distance because I would have very big knee pain. I realise that this transport behaviour is different from that of my family, my parents walk more or use public transport, only in emergency conditions do I use the taxi. I think the only way I could resort to that would be to live in the proximity of the workplace. Unfortunately, however, the present financial situation does not allow me to do so, I earn around 400 euros per month and the rent in this apartment, which I still share with one person, costs 250 euros. And if I moved near my job, there the rents are higher, around 400 euros. So, at the moment, I can't afford to do that.

Quotes

Most of the time public transportation is incredibly crowded, which allows many criminals to take advantage of people's inattention.

I want to use a more sustainable means of transport, but unfortunately, my resources are limited.

However, I also make a cost-benefit calculation: if I used public transport or walked, I would save money, but I would lose time and endanger my physical and emotional health and integrity, respectively.

Keywords

Safety, health, proximity, comfort, congestion

RL8_RO04, Romania, The benefits of public transportation

Narrative

I am a 30-year-old man, I live for rent in a North-Eastern city of Romania, in one of the largest neighbourhoods of the city. The neighbourhood where I live is not considered a central area of the city, but it is in its proximity, there are about 3 kilometres to the centre, which can be achieved by walking in 20 minutes. It is an entirely urban area, consisting of blocks of flats, without houses. It has quite a few major streets that connect with many points of interest of the city, such as the city's main train station, the city's largest food market, as well as some very large hospital clinics. Thus, the traffic is quite intense, a lot of blockages are formed at almost any time of the day. It is also a neighbourhood where there are 4 educational institutions, so, extremely transited by students and parents. I don't own a personal car, I travel, most of the time, by public transport. They can use, thanks to the infrastructure of the neighbourhood, both buses and trams. I prefer to use the bus to travel to work, being a direct line to the neighbourhood where I work. I am lucky that I have the choice between 4 different variants, which I know is not true for many of my colleagues or friends. I have the possibility to choose either a direct bus where the route takes around 10 minutes, or another bus that passes through the city centre where the journey takes around 20 minutes, or a bus that transits several neighbourhoods and the city centre and the journey takes 40 minutes, or I can change two tram lines. In the latter

situation, the journey is more difficult because an optimal waiting interval must be identified between the two trips in order to be able to reach your destination in a timely manner. Also, many of the trams are quite old and present a number of technical problems. Just recently I saw how a door was opened in the case of a tram passing through the transport station. Passengers were taken down, traffic on the tram line was blocked, it was an unpleasant situation that could endanger the health of passengers.

I think the transport options I have are quite diverse and allow me to choose depending on the available time. Also, the municipality has created a number of advantages for employees at state institutions. For example, based on the service card, I get a 50% discount on a monthly subscription payment, valid on all transport lines. It is, therefore, a benefit that I have the opportunity to enjoy, especially since the price of travel has become more expensive and I earn about 400 euros salary and the rent of the apartment where I live with my girlfriend is 250 euros.

In addition, the logistics of the fleet have improved lately, we have seen that more trams with a higher travel capacity have been purchased, as well as the purchase of electric buses has been started. I rarely walk, just for personal purposes I do this, to meet up with friends or for shopping. Similarly, they rarely use taxis or car-sharing services, only if public transport is no longer available. I think my practices are rather opposed to others, colleagues or friends. I notice that they use their personal car daily, even to go short distances. So, my transport behaviour I consider to be, rather, counter-normative. I believe that we have a relatively low environmental impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. If we each make a change, I believe things wouldn't change very much. If the industrial giants were to change the practices by which they pollute, then yes, the change would be much stronger. Also, in Romania, it seems to me that this culture determines you have a car, because it is an indicator of status. However, as a personal example, more as a model of conduit, growing up in a family that did not have a personal car and that has always done without, we have seen very easily that we can achieve our mobility without a personal car and that you can live even very well without it.

I don't think I could be convinced to use the bike to carry me or the electric scooter. The tracks are very few and poorly arranged. They are also present on the sidewalk of pedestrians and there have been a series of accidents in the city– pedestrians and injured cyclists. And using the bike on the street is extremely risky. From what I have noticed, drivers do not respect the minimum distance limit between the vehicle and cyclists. I think they're taking pretty big risks, in that regard. Like pedestrians, drivers do not always respect their rights. Both categories are behind the food chain; drivers do not respect the rights of either pedestrians or cyclists.

Quotes

Also, the municipality has created a number of advantages for employees at state institutions.

I believe that we, at an individual level, have a relatively low environmental impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions.

Keywords

Benefits, infrastructure, choices, public transport, logistics

RL8_RO05, Romania, Living in the right place

Narrative

I am a 30-year-old woman, I live in a north-eastern city of Romania in a rented apartment with my partner. I work in an educational institution and I am a school counsellor. I live in one of the largest neighbourhoods of the city, a neighbourhood that – even if it is not considered to be central, is located in immediate proximity of the centre, at a distance of 2.5 kilometres from the historical centre. The neighbourhood where I live offers all the facilities I need daily, starting from the food market, schools and kindergartens, banks and shopping centres.

There are several means of transport, both buses, and trams. I think that public transport is quite well established in this neighbourhood. It is also located in the proximity of the central railway station of the city, facilitating access to the means of transport to the outskirts of the city. On a typical day, I use public transport to travel to work, especially a direct bus line to the neighbourhood where the school I work for is located. If the purpose of the trip is another, for example, for shopping at the hypermarket on the outskirts of the city, I use either a bus or a tram. To have access to the city centre, I prefer just to use the tram or to walk. The problem is that the infrastructure of the tram lines has not been completely modernised in the city. A process of restoration and modernization of the tram lines has begun, but only some portions of the city have been completed. We were recently in a situation where a tram derailed from the line, which caused all passengers to get off and walk to the next station. Naturally, that line was blocked, so I spent a significant amount of time being stuck in that area, at a distance of 5 kilometres from the point where I was supposed to get to. However, we have noticed that the municipality has invested in purchasing new, modern and much more spacious trams. This is something that is to be appreciated and which, I hope, will lead to a greater use of public transport by the people of the city who use their personal car. The primary deficiency related to how the means of transport generally circulate in the city is that of the traffic schedule, in the sense that it is never predictable or known by passengers. Recently, several display panels have been installed in transport stations, but they are based on connectivity with the car's GPS – and drivers do not always activate the GPS or it is defective. As a consequence, passengers never have the certainty when a particular means of transport arrives at the station. One of the difficulties that arose during the period of restrictions was

related to the impossibility of purchasing travel tickets. The ticket shops closed and some automatic machines were installed in the means of transport where you could purchase by paying by card. The problem is that public transport has become more expensive in the city and I, based on the transport card, benefit from a discount when purchasing from the specialised store. This discount is crucial for me, because my monthly income is about 350 euros of which around 150 euros I pay for the rent of the house. That's why it was important to get to the specialised stores in order to benefit from that discount.

I had to walk 4 kilometres a day to get to school when I was a kid. I was born and raised in Suceava County, I have been staying in the city for almost 12 years. Thus, I was used to walking or cycling to the places where I had to go. I used cycling as a child. I tried to put into practice the same mode of transport in Iasi, but it is perilous. There are no lanes for cyclists, or rather, they are not made in a manner consistent with the needs of cyclists. For example, suppose I wanted to move from the neighbourhood where I live to the old city centre. In that case, the distance is 2.5 kilometres but I would have to go to the main streets where no pedestrian lanes are marked, to cross an extremely crowded car bridge with 3 lanes in each direction, to get to the main street of the station with 4 lanes per direction – a street that is heavily trafficked by heavy cars tonnage and only towards the end of the race could I enter the lanes intended for cyclists. Lanes, which, occupy from the sidewalk of pedestrians. And where there is no danger from drivers, there is from pedestrians. There have been some pretty serious incidents between pedestrians and cyclists. So, I concluded that the use of the bicycle in the city is not sustainable, neither from the point of view of physical health (I have to go on the crowded streets and inhale the vapours of the cars), nor of the physical integrity (There are many dangers, both on the street from the drivers, but also on the sidewalk because of the pedestrians). I am aware that certain things could be improved, such as walking more or using other means that pollute less. Nevertheless, at the same time, fatigue arises due to daily duties. I think it's a better way to go by bus than to walk to where I need it. It's also more convenient than walking. At the same time, I know it would be more beneficial for the environment if I turned to other means of transport.

Quotes

And where there is no danger from drivers, there is from pedestrians.

The primary deficiency related to how the means of transport generally circulate in Iasi is that of the traffic schedule, in the sense that it is never predictable or known by passengers.

Keywords

Benefits of public transport, modernization of fleet, cycling lanes, pedestrians, health

RL8_RO06, Romania, The effort in using public transportation in Iasi

Narrative

I am a married woman, I am 44 years old, and I have a 12-year-old daughter. I was born and live in a North-Eastern city of Romania, and I am a client advisor at a multinational company. I live in a peripheral neighbourhood of the city, but this outskirts places it in about 15 minutes' walk to the city centre; I would not say that it's a peripheral neighbourhood. I've lived in this neighbourhood since I was born.

My weekly routine is From Monday to Friday, starting at 07.20 in the morning, I drive to work. The specificity of my job is the fulfilment of some needs of tourism clients and therefore involves field work. So, every day I drive the car, about 50 kilometres a day, as an average of the days of the week. So, unfortunately, the specifics of the workplace cause me to use the car on a daily basis. It is worth mentioning that the car is not personal but is offered by the company I work for. I can also use it for personal needs outside of office hours if it gets approval from my direct boss.

For personal purposes or in my spare time, I prefer to use public transport or walk where I need to. There are, however, times when we use the car even in our free time. For example, I have to take my girl to the dance lessons twice a week. Unfortunately, she has become accustomed to being more comfortable; she prefers to go by car. I think we, the parents, are also to blame for that; in order to take advantage of our free time, we prefer to go by car and not to waste time waiting for the means of public transport. Unfortunately, the infrastructure of the means of transport in the city is a deficit; when I was a student I had to go to high school using the bus. And I would always waste time, sometimes in a bitter cold, waiting at the bus stop. That's why we preferred to walk when we gathered a group of colleagues. When I got pregnant, I had to drop out of university. But I resumed my studies 2 years ago, during the pandemic period. Now that my daughter is older, I know I could devote more time to studying. We attend teaching activities during the weekend days. And in my two years of study, I preferred to go to classes using the public bus. Bus stops are quite frequent, but the frequency of the means of transport is not enough. In order to be able to walk with a direct line to the university, I had to walk 15 minutes to the bus stop. The waiting time varies; there have been situations when we have waited even 30 minutes. And the journey time is about 40 minutes, depending on the traffic density. It is, therefore, an effort to use public transport in the city. Compared to using the car, which brings me a lot of effort but also efficiency in achieving the purpose of the trip, to go by public transport, I should have a time advance of 1 hour. Which, very often, is not possible. Either for financial reasons or time, I can't afford to waste so much time in traffic. Panels now placed at each bus station should show the waiting time until the desired means of transport arrives. Unfortunately, however, many of them display erroneous information. I do not know if the problem is with the billboards or the GPS of the means of transport, but we often waited longer than expected or, on the contrary, the bus had already left. During the pandemic, we had reluctance to use public transport, it was considered a vector of the illness. There really was a time when we could not get on the

means of transport if we did not present the work card stating that we were employed in a sanitary institution. Subsequently, there was a time when it was impossible to access the means of transport except within the limit of the seats. Then there was chaos, people rushing to catch a seat, otherwise, they had to wait for the next car.

I wish I could have more sustainable mobility, but I cannot afford to do that financially. Even if my job only ensures that my simple needs are met, I earn about 350 euros a month, I can't afford to change my job. The only way to be more sustainable in terms of transport is to change the company car for an electric one. But this I cannot decide, it's an asset of the company that has to be decided by the company. If 20 years ago I was only using public transport and I wanted to stop doing this, now I think the other way around – I wish I didn't drive so much anymore. Because all this driving activity produces a lot of fatigue and stress. I believe that even we – those of us who are forced through the prism of work tasks to drive on a daily basis, could help reduce the effects of greenhouse emissions if we gave up the vehicle at least on weekends. But unfortunately, from what I see in my friends or colleagues, that's not what happens. The car brings, with it, comfort and ease in carrying out everyday tasks. I think motherhood's role and responsibilities have also accentuated this need. My husband worked outside the city at some times of the year and I had to do everything myself. Or, if I did not have the opportunity to use the car, I do not think that I would have coped with all the tasks: taking the child to school, shopping, and other additional activities. Unfortunately, I wouldn't have gotten the hours of a day to do it all.

Quotes

If 20 years ago I was only using public transport and I wanted to stop doing this, now I think the other way around – I wish I didn't drive so much anymore, The only way to be more sustainable in terms of transport is to change the company car for an electric one.

It is, therefore, an effort to use public transport in the city.

Keywords

Company car, public transportation, needs, infrastructure, certainty

RL8_RO07, Romania, It's difficult to break the habit of using the car

Narrative



I am a 48-year-old man, married and I have a little girl of almost 12 years. I was born, grew up, and live in a north-eastern city of Romania. Since 1998 I have been working in sales, and I think I have driven over a million kilometres. I live in a neighbourhood that was initially said to be on the city's outskirts. As strong as the city of has developed in the last 15 years, now I think I am very close to the centre, so I am staying in an excellent area that provides all the facilities.

A typical working day begins at 7.15 in the morning; then, I start the car. My weekly schedule would be somehow Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I drive inside the city of Iasi, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays outside it, reaching Bacau or Suceava. In general, the traffic in the city is terrible from morning to evening, with small traffic breaks when you say that everything goes easier. The same goes for the other cities I have to go to because of my job. For personal purposes, I prefer not to use the car. Only when we go with the family shopping farther away from home or for other urgent things. In other words, I like not to use the car in my free time, but mostly walk. If we have established, for example, with the family, that we go for a walk or go somewhere, simply to relax, then we take the means of public transport, for the reason that others go by car and it is a disaster, you have nowhere to park and then I prefer to take the bus. We go, walk or eat something or watch a movie and return home by bus. Somehow, I think it's more logical and lighter than having the stress of driving and parking.

I believe that the main bottleneck we have regarding the transition to a sustainable mode of transport comes from the authorities. The fact that the imports of second-hand cars, which are so many years old and cheap – many have bought those cars and want to use them, have been released. (e.g., You see, dear Lord, I buy a car and I want to show everyone that I have a car). Because of that, the need for social status, it got very crowded. Primarily since the road infrastructure remained the same, a ratio between the number of cars and the number of people was not established, and the qualities of the infrastructure were not taken into account. Therefore, Romania has become Europe's landfill, and all the obsolete cars that consume and pollute extremely much are on the roads of the motherland.

I would choose to ride a bike in my free time, but I am not convinced that one can be 100% safe in Iasi, in this traffic. I know how to ride a bike, but I am still reluctant to go down the street as a cyclist. Young, furious drivers, who over-appreciate their driving skills, all represent risk elements, not only as driver traffic participants but also as a cyclist.

Another option to increase the sustainability of mobility would be to replace cars with hybrid or electric cars, especially in the case of those forced to use the vehicle daily. It would be a good step for the environment, but if we think that a battery for an electric car, after 8 or 10 years, as the manufacturers say, a battery that costs a few thousand or tens of thousands of euros must be changed ... at the current standard of living, I do not know how many are buying their car now electric, and after 8 years they will have the financial resources to replace it.

Others similar to me use, most of the time, their car. If we plan an event where we decide to go somewhere to walk, they do not use the car either. But the reason is related to traffic congestion – this is the main reason why they give up their personal car. The habit of using the car and the convenience and efficiency offered by it are things that we give up with difficulty. Out of convenience, I go shopping by car. It's more difficult to go by bus with your bags full; so, we went by car, put the shopping in our luggage, returned home. My family's financial situation is not brilliant; my wife and I earn the minimum on the

economy. So, we often go to certain stores with discounts, which are often a great distance from home. We would have to change or 3 means of public transport to be able to get there. That's why we prefer to use the car, out of convenience.

Even if I use the car daily, firstly because of the specifics of the job, secondly because of efficiency (especially when I have to take my child to school or other extra-curricular activities), thirdly out of convenience (especially when it comes to shopping for the needs of the family), I realise that when I decide not to use the car and use public transport or walk, I do it most of the time from the constraints generated by the heavy traffic in the city.

Quotes

The habit of using the car and the convenience and efficiency offered by it are things that we give up with difficulty. I know how to ride a bike, but I am still reluctant to go down the street as a cyclist.

Romania has become Europe's landfill, and all the obsolete cars that consume and pollute extremely much are on the roads of the motherland.

Keywords

Heavy traffic, comfort, habit, efficiency, driving

RL8_RO08, Romania, When you don't have the luxury to own your own car, you manage with public transportation

Narrative

I am a 70-year-old woman, retired, and I live in a north-eastern city of Romania. I suffer from gonarthrosis in one knee and I am diagnosed with hypertension. I was born in a village, and since 1970 I have lived in the city, in a neighbourhood considered peripheral but which provides access to the central area in maximum of 20 minutes of walking – for those with alert walking, of course. In my case, about a 45-minute walk to get to the old city centre.

Ever since the year I moved to the city, and was implicitly, employed in this city, I used only the means of public transport. In the times before the revolution, things were not

entirely different from the situation now. Just as much crowding in public transport, especially at the hours when the work shifts start. I remember how sometimes I had to stay on the steps of the tram, with the doors open, at 5 a.m. to make sure I got to work (located in the industrial area of the city, on the outskirts). During the day, people circulated less often, not like today. Now it's crowded most of the time, no matter what time you drive. Sometimes, when the financial situation required it, I could not afford to buy travel tickets, I had to walk about 10 kilometres to get to work. So, I had to leave about one hour and a half early to ensure I arrived on time.

On the current days, I walk, most of the time on foot. The food market is 20 minutes away from home, about this distance, I can tolerate so that joint pain does not occur. The bus stops are near me; we have easy access to buses. There are no tram lines near my neighbourhood; the nearest tram line is at a distance of 20 minutes. It is also the line I used when I was working, to get to the city's industrial area (since then). I still have neighbours who prefer to take the bus for a single stop, but I don't agree, we also have to move and free up the streets because there's a lot of congestion on the street. Sometimes you are afraid as a pedestrian to cross. Everyone (in the cars) is in a hurry, sometimes they do not give you priority and so you are obliged to force the passage. Otherwise, you can sit and wait long and well.

I usually go by bus when I travel a longer distance, more than 35 minutes of walking. But the neighbourhood I've lived in since 1970 now offers me all the necessary amenities. Sometimes my children ask me to take my grandchildren to school; the school is in another neighbourhood, but I take advantage of this road to enjoy my niece's company.

For us, low-income pensioners, it's now easier to access public transport. I remember the times when I was hired, and sometimes I couldn't afford to buy a travel ticket. Now, because we have small pensions, the municipality has created free cards for us to access public transport. Unfortunately, however, I notice that many pensioners abuse this facility and walk here and there even to a station, occupying a place in an already crowded means of transport, often with students coming from school. I've always thought about the good of others and that is why I refuse, for example, to go by bus to the classes when students leave school, I do not want to overcrowd the bus myself, so I choose to walk.

I think my generation, who didn't even have the financial resources, was always used to public transport or walking. Back then, not many people could afford to buy a car, it was a sign of luxury. Now, however, I see more and more people buying cars, some newer, but most old. The people have become very comfortable, no one wants to make the effort to get to their destination, they prefer to throw themselves in the car and make 10 minutes to get there, than to do 30 minutes by bus (including here the possible waiting time). That is why the air is so polluting. I want to walk more, over longer distances on foot, but unfortunately, medical problems prevent me from doing so.

Quotes

I think my generation, who didn't even have the financial resources, was always used to public transport or walking. I notice that many pensioners abuse this facility and walk here and there even to a station, occupying a place in an already crowded means of transport.

Keywords

Comfort, financial resources, pensioners, facilities, crowded traffic

RL8_RO09, Romania, Living in the university campus

Narrative

I am a 19-year-old woman, a student, and I live on the university campus of the University where I study. I was born in the Republic of Moldova and I emigrated to Romania from the moment I started my high school studies.

Ever since I was in high school, I used my bike to move to school. Now I try to do the same, but the bike lanes in the city are extremely few. I am staying at one of the dormitories of the University, at a distance of 4 stations from the faculty. When I have classes in college and the weather is favourable, I ride my bike; we have a bike path from the dorm to the college. But I've come across several risk situations on the cycling lanes. Unfortunately, the bike path is located on the sidewalk of pedestrians, taking up space from it. Moreover, many pedestrians do not respect the line of demarcation and circulate on it. I've been in many situations where I've been offended and even hit by pedestrians for honking them to clear the bike lane.

When the weather is not favourable, I prefer to walk to university. The road to college is quite pleasant, I have the opportunity to go through the parks of the neighbourhood and enjoy nature. The only difficulties I have are about the crossing. The main street is always very crowded with cars, buses and trams. And if it's not a traffic-lighted pedestrian crossing, I am afraid to cross. Many of the drivers don't give you a priority, some even honk you or swear at you if you stop them from crossing. It is also a hazardous crossing, there have been a few accidents in which pedestrians were also involved. The streets on Copou hill are, in the evening, a place where several drivers from the city come and compete with their cars. That is how I heard of a student at another specialization who was fatally injured on the pedestrian crossing. At night, traffic light crossings turn off, thus giving drivers the opportunity not to give priority. Moreover, I avoid walking to the dorm if I finish classes at a late hour, when it has already darkened, or if I return from a meeting with friends. Some areas are not adequately lit, and I am afraid to walk there.

I turn to public transport if I can't walk or ride a bike. Students who have state financing receive several facilities for accessing public transport, such as substantial discounts on the monthly subscription price. So, I have a discounted subscription, and the transport prices are not low relative to the monthly income. I avoid going by public

transport, I prefer to walk when I have the possibility. First, I had several negative experiences; twice, things were stolen from my bag. Sometimes, you can still be fooled no matter how careful you are. Most of the means of transport that lead to the University, trams or buses, come from more remote areas on the city's outskirts. Very often, it is incredibly crowded. The good part is that there are certain intervals with buses dedicated to students and students. Theoretically, drivers or controllers should ensure that those who board that bus or tram dedicated to these categories are part of them. I often saw older people returning from the market, getting up, and occupying a place in the buses dedicated to students. It is incorrect; students must get to classes promptly, and retirees can wait for the next bus.

I believe that all of us can make an individual contribution to reducing the impact on the environment. I have many colleagues who come from other counties of the country by personal car; they walk daily to college with it, even if the distance is sometimes less than a kilometre. I admit that some of my colleagues made jokes at my expense when they saw me with the bike protection equipment; they prefer to use their car or bus. I don't think my transportation practices have changed since the restrictions due to COVID-19, as frequently I used a bicycle or public transport.

Quotes

At night, traffic lights turn off, thus giving drivers the opportunity not to give priority.

The good part is that there are certain intervals with buses dedicated to students and students.

Keywords

Cycling, bike lanes, traffic lights, pedestrians, public transportation

RL8_RO10, Romania, Using municipality facilities

Narrative

I am a 74-year-old man, I have been living in a north-eastern city of Romania since 1968. I am retired and have worked all my life in the construction field. I was diagnosed with arthrosis and hearing problems and I have to wear a sound amplification device. I have

two children, a girl, and a boy, and one granddaughter of ten years old. Both my children live in the city, the boy living in the same neighbourhood as me, and the girl at a greater distance. I live with my wife, she's also retired, in the same neighbourhood since the block of apartments we live in was built. Our neighbourhood is considered to be on the city's outskirts, given that it is near one of the 7 hills that encircle the city, but the distance to the city centre is minimal. Also, the neighbourhood offers all the facilities we need, pharmacies, banks, and grocery stores. Also, in our immediate vicinity, in the next neighbourhood at a distance of 10 minutes, there is a medical clinic. During the covid-19 restrictions, my two children were by our side and helped us with the necessary things. When I could, I would walk to the store or where I needed it, I would avoid using public transport.

Means of transport are at hand in our case. Unfortunately, it is a single main street that transits the neighbourhood and connects with other larger neighbourhoods or the city centre. Every morning, I buy my newspapers of the day from the neighbourhood store and have the opportunity to see how crowded it is. I walk there every time, the distance is relatively small. Buses are blocked, there are many cars, and the air is practically impossible to breathe. It should be noted that our neighbourhood connects several neighbourhoods to the central area. It is understandable why so many traffic jams are created, given that it is a single main street. Very few times or days have I seen the traffic police direct the traffic. Moreover, some of the secondary streets that still had the chance to be used by those with cars as shortcuts – thus easing the congestion for buses, became one-way streets. Again, another reason for making traffic more difficult. Also, often when walking, I have to be very careful. The hearing aid reacts to loud noises and stops working. Thus, I have to be very careful when crossing, I cannot hear well the horns of cars. Moreover, the drivers from Iasi tend to honk quite frequently, it can be a real adventure to cross the street in places without traffic lights. That is why I sometimes prefer to use the bus, even for short distances, to protect myself from the risks I am exposed to in front of drivers as a pedestrian.

If sometimes I have to go to the food market after buying my newspapers, I usually take public transport. Only buses run in our area; we do not have tram lines. It is a considerable distance for me, I have joint pain if I walk so much. That is why I prefer to use the bus. Unfortunately, the congestion is so dense that I can stay on the bus for as much as 30 minutes until I travel from the newspaper store to the market, even under two kilometres. I tend to use public transport more often, primarily because of the facilities offered by the municipality. In the case of pensioners who have low incomes, we receive a card that guarantees free of charge in any means of transport within the city. The same gratuity does not apply to travel between localities, only within the municipality.

Most people I know of my own age use public transport or walk around. I've noticed that more young people use their car for any distance, no matter how small it is.

I pick up most of the information about environmental issues from television or my children explain me to it. I try to keep an environmental footprint as small as possible. In the future, I do not know what I could change to become more sustainable, I think my transport choices are pretty environmentally friendly.

I believe that every human can do his or her part in protecting the environment. I believe that our actions, combined, can help us enjoy what surrounds us in the future as well. However, I believe that the primary responsibility falls on the shoulders of the

authorities, which should propose effective and inclusive solutions for everyone to put into practice.

Quotes

That is why I sometimes prefer to use the bus, even for short distances, to protect myself from the risks I am exposed to in front of drivers as a pedestrian.

I tend to use public transport more often, primarily because of the facilities offered by the municipality.

Keywords

Pedestrian, public transportation, facilities, risk, traffic congestion

RL8_SE01, Sweden, Linda: I don't use the bus because you don't get any help

Narrative

My name is Linda, I am 45 years old, lives in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I live in my own apartment, it's assisted living. My parents live outside my city. I use taxi, I mean transport service, most of the time during winter, but during summertime I walk a lot. It depends on the weather and if it is slippery. If the weather looks good, I walk, if not, then I go by taxi. It depends on what kind of solution there is if I walk.

I go to various activities, I go bowling and it is far to travel there, so I use transport service for that. If it is near, I walk, sing practice and so. It depends on where I am going if I choose transport service or walking. For example, if I am going to specific place in the city and then home to my parents and they can't drive me so then you must think how to do this, so then I maybe call transport service or call someone who lives close by. So, you have to figure it out, you can't just ask for a ride, you have to think bit by bit to find a solution that works. Before you call and ask for transport service you need to think about different solutions first.

I don't use the bus because you don't get any help. I have problems with my balance. When I've ridden the bus, you haven't gotten the help you're asking for. I may push the wrong button and pay too much even though I have a transport service card. They may swindle me on money each time.

I go less on the bus now compared to before the pandemic. I have become more withdrawn, I feel as though I am moving backwards, I have lost control over myself. Bus and taxi are both yes and no, sometimes you feel safe and sometimes not. It depends on who you meet. It's not the same person, but different persons.

I go only in the winter by taxi, and then I think about the environment, I try not to travel too much. And when I must go with my parents, I think that petrol should be paid for, and that they must drive back and forth. Same thing with taxi. So, you must think every now and then taxi, car or walk. If I try to go by bus, but it is difficult when they lower the bus for people to get off, you need help or need to help others who are in a wheelchair. Or if the bus is full, you must wait for the next one, this is stressful – they could say that there will be another bus shortly, but they don't.

I know how to cycle, but it is like I have lost the desire to cycle, when there was a pandemic, you wouldn't be out too much and then you would have lost control. I have a three-wheeled bike, but if I'm going to ride a bike, I must have someone with me, I'm not allowed to ride myself. Then bike lanes as they have done, difficult to distinguish between pedestrian path and bike lane. I used to cycle to get groceries before but now the bike is parked in my storage space. My assistant used to help me with directions, they cycled in front and I in the back, then I could focus on cycling. Now I walk, I have an app, so that mum knows where I am. She can see on her mobile where I am. We have contact even though we do not talk. Good if I get lost.

To book via the transport service app is difficult, there are new functions, and you need to keep track of log in codes. This makes it hard to use it myself, it's difficult, I ask my parents to help me. But at the same time, it is hard to ask them, I want to be independent. I have received too much help and then you feel like a teenager again that you must start over again. Now you must build up what you knew before. Now I'm going to try to do this myself, but at the same time it's hard to keep up with these suggestions for times you get from transport service. Then you get a pickup time, and they say that digitally and I have a hard time understanding that. Sometimes I have asked them "what time should the clock hands show but then they get a little annoyed", "why don't you know the digital, it's enough that I've said it once". I say I have difficulties understanding digital times and then they become sour, and then I hang up the phone if they don't want to listen. Then I lose the desire to call, and I ask my mum, and then I feel silly for having to ask her. It feels silly to have to ask the parents all the time. One wants to be independent and manage oneself. Sometimes I ask for help to cross the crosswalk, if I lose my balance or if it is too dark, that's the only way, then I can get help. I want to raise awareness of what it is like to live with disabilities, and what kinds of help there is to get, that is my goal to – to talk about this.

Quotes

I'm having a bit of a hard time with the balance. [On the bus] I can ask the driver if he can help me ask if I can sit there to stand. But when he doesn't help, then you have to ask the people on the bus and it feels silly to ask the people on the bus, they might not want to answer that question. Then there's the thing about pressing buttons, I also ask about that but no answer.

If the transportation service does not arrive on time, you will panic even more. I don't know the digital clock. Can't they just say what the clock should be? Then it is likely that I would know. If they become irritated, I hang up the phone. Then I become angry and irritated because they don't listen. Then I lost the desire to call, and I ask my mum to call.

In the transportation service taxi, I've felt a smell of smoke in the car, and I felt 'should I go in there and sit down or should I cancel? Then you feel, how do you deal with this, and then I think about if they really are allowed to smoke and then have customers in the car. [...] If you tell it to them, you might get told off, then you feel like shut up. [...] I got scared and felt angry, inside here, I wasn't straight out.

Then it happens that I quarrelled with the transfer driver and got to talk to the big manager there. The taxi guy came and when I was getting in the car then he threw coffee at me, then I got scared and went back to [name of work] and my boss to cry and I had coffee in clothes and everywhere and nothing to change with. Then my boss had to say [to the driver] you have to leave. Then the driver wanted proof etc but that's why it took me to start riding again.

Keywords

Intellectual disability, Corona, everyday transport routine, increased isolation, striving for independence, practice, seasons, weather, distance, safety in public space Knowledge and skills in how to use public transport, how to cycle

RL8_SE02, Sweden, Malin: I liked cycling before, but it has become a hinder

Narrative

My name is Malin, I am 36 years old, I live in a middle-sized city in Sweden. My parents, siblings and I live in the same city. I have my own apartment, but I also have what is called mobile support team, so they come to my home to check on me twice a week. I walk a lot, I go to work ("daily activity centre"), I use transport service otherwise for specific occasions. Last week for example I was at a shopping mall outside of the city with a friend, then I went by transport service there. I also use transport service to get to my parents, but my dad also come pick me up. It depends. I use transport service to go to social activities, like on Thursday I will go theatre class. And me and a friend get a ride home afterwards. I went to the shopping mall by transport service instead of bus because I have used the bus four times max during the entire Corona period. I used to go by bus much more before the pandemic, but I don't anymore.

I am aware of environmental issues, they say you should not go so much in car, bus and so on. But still, they increase the fare prices, and you think it is as expensive as parking and taking the car to the city. Then it would be better if they lowered the bus fares for those who use the bus. For many years ago when I used the bus, like many years ago, it costed 7 SEK or so. For grown-ups 10 SEK and children 5 SEK, like it's much more expensive now, it's almost 30 SEK, so there is a big difference. Transport service is 40 SEK per transport. With my card it was first 8 SEK on the bus and later 12 SEK, now I don't know since I have not travelled by bus for almost 3,5 years. I walk, go by transport service, and go with mom and dad.

I can use my app to see what bookings I have with the transport service. But there is a lack of coordination by the transport service. The other day I was at a shopping mall outside the city where I live and me and my friend called transport service from the same place, she ordered her service 10 minutes later than I, we still got two different taxis even though we were to go to the same place almost in the city I live in. I got to go in a big bus all by myself, it's a bit strange when you book even though they know you are going from the same place to... it may be the computer that is a bit crazy. Before I needed help to book by housing support, that was long ago, now I have learned to call myself. I also book via the app, then you don't need to wait in a queue for like 45 minutes. It feels like they are taking a coffee break or something. The app you the time directly, and you can change if you like.

I walk a lot, me, and my friend, "we walk and walk and walk". As when we were at the shopping mall the other day, we didn't have a car, so we walked between the stores. We used to walk around, this is different to a car, we had to carry all the Christmas gifts we bought. Sometimes we thought it would be so nice to go by car. People with cars who can drive around have it very nice. And I don't have a driver's license. I can't, there's too much noise straight ahead, I don't know right and left, then you must be in control of the car, you can't sit and talk, you must keep an eye on the road.

I used to cycle a lot before, but I have had surgery which made me not dare to cycle anymore. Before I cycled everywhere, cycled to work and to the city – but after the surgery I don't like to have things on my head. So, after that my bike has been in the basement for almost 6 years. I always wore a helmet then. I have become more, I don't know, it's harder. When I cycled, I only went from home to work and from city to home, I did not cycle anywhere else. I cycled by myself.

Bus is too crowded, it is stressful. I used to go by bus much more before the pandemic, I went with three different routes. I choose the one with less people. I don't use public buses anymore.

When I walk, I take company with a friend, we walk along a bike lane and pass a grill restaurant and along the water, but only when she is with me. Otherwise, I walk along the road, then there are more people around, so it feels better. I don't want to walk alone. I become stressed up if I am to do things by myself, I phone someone or listen to a pod or something. It is good that you can walk by yourself, that you book a taxi yourself, that you can choose a little freely how you want to do it. But I would not go longer distances myself or with a group of friends. If something happened you would need someone with you, someone who could help if there were delays or if you needed to buy new tickets or something. You need that support. You feel safe in the city I live in, but it would be nice to go to Stockholm, but then you would need one or two people with you. You may have an argument with your friends because you are nervous.

Quotes

[on Corona] they said you should not use the bus, they said you should not meet people and you'd have a mask on the bus and you'd have to this and that and a mask I don't like it because I can't breathe with a mask. Since when the pandemic came, you have become more stressed.

I liked cycling before, but it has become a hinder.

Keywords

Intellectual disability, Corona, practicing transport, isolation; striving for independence, stress, transport costs

RL8_SE03, Sweden, Silje: I am dependent upon the bus

Narrative

My name is Silje, I am 91 years old. I am a widow for five years, I have three grown up children, also grandchildren and cats. I live on the outskirts of the city I live in and are dependent on the bus to get around. I walk to the bus, and I walk every day in the surrounding woods. I perceive this as not a problem, the buses are reliable, and I can still walk myself to the bus stop. I used to cycle to work, or even ski if necessary. My husband used the car to work at the hospital in the city centre. I used to work as a schoolteacher in one of the socially vulnerable areas of the city, I was a teacher that took care of children with special needs. I also like sports, I did a lot of sports in my youth, but nothing special, just for fun.

When I retired there was a transition to computers, but I retired then, so I am no specialist in computers. I have a bit of difficulty with mobile phones and I'm not very technical. My children and grandchildren are helping me with things like that and, yes, driving me if there's anything I need to do. I took the bus to the hospital to get the 5th vaccine shot last Monday. The only problem with transport I experience is that one needs a computer to buy tickets and check how much money you have on your travel card. I considered myself "dumb" for not understanding, or not taking interest I should say, in how computers can be used for these purposes. I get help from my son to fill up the card – but then I can't overview how much money I have on the card.

I grew up in Norway during the war. There is a long history with the occupation in Norway and that is where my memories come back to more now. It is something you never forget. I was living in Norway at the time of the second world war and experienced the Nazi invasion as a child, I was 8,5 years old when Nazi Germany invaded. My husband was a medical student in Oslo, who fled to Sweden from the Nazi invasion. He had to flee to Sweden. They were told to go underground. They were a group of five men and got false documents and all, and took the train from Oslo, this was very dangerous at that time, they got to a Norwegian town nearby the Swedish border, and from there they got on their skis for three nights to get into Sweden. At the Swedish border they burned all their papers, and they also had guides who knew where to go, during what times the Nazi patrolled the border and so on. So, he finished his medical training in [name of city] and we met a number of years after, got married and since then I have been in Sweden. One can be Norwegian in Sweden and Swedish in Norway, that is totally ok – I say I am Scandinavian.

I am used to manage my own life; I have not considered transport service [subsidised taxi, mainly for disabled and elderly] as an option for me. When I needed to go somewhere that requires a car, my children or grandchildren helped me with that. But they are very occupied, as young people are today. I can go with two different services to the city centre. I used to take a course in city centre, I take the bus to town to take part in my French course, or to take part in social events. In the winter I use spikes on my shoes to be safe, and I use walking sticks, because I suffer from dizziness. I had cataract surgery on my eyes, and it didn't go so well on one eye. There was a little fog on the yellow spot, so I use a backpack and walking sticks. I have a crossword friend to visit, thankfully my friend lives along one of my bus lines. I no longer drive a car, it got stolen but before that I felt I did not want to drive anymore, you know with the age and all if something should happen. And especially if the eyes are not fully functioning. I did not feel insecure about driving but that was a long time ago now. After that I became much more dependent upon the bus. And the bike, I used to cycle a lot but that was a long time ago. It's also about the age, and they eye and dizziness. I don't want to cycle anymore, but I used to do that a lot.

So, the environment is important, of course, but what can you do, the car runs on petrol. I cycled to work every day, I liked it and it was the best way to get to work. My husband took the car mostly, he worked late in life as well, so it was most convenient. But I wanted to cycle because I enjoyed it, I have always liked being outdoors. Same with the kids.

Covid did not affect my travel habits much, I used the bus for my errands. You had to wear mask in the bus, which was fine. I am vaccinated and all. I am not so worried about being infected.

So, for me sustainability is about not throwing away food, never throw away food. I think you should take care of what you have, and you don't throw away unnecessarily and that makes me sick. The stuff they find in the oceans also affects me; all the stuff people put in there. And since I have experienced the war, so you also know that I, I didn't have to starve. We had a small farm; my father was a teacher, and it came with a small farm, so we had cows and pigs and chickens. And we lived in the country, so I remember my aunt from Oslo came and had a special pad under the bottom of the pram and my little cousin was only one year old. She brought her a lot of stuff that was completely illegal to take with her, but that was nothing anyone got to know about.

Quotes

You can't do anything but drive the car and it runs on petrol, so what can you do about that?

No, as long as you can manage, the best thing is not to be too much of a burden for other people.

I don't buy more than what I have use for and I don't throw away food. I do not. And if I don't eat it so the magpies do, or I feed it to the birds.

Yes, I have thought about how long the earth exists so you think about your children and grandchildren, I do that too, but I can't go and make myself more scared than I should.

Keywords

Bus dependency, computer illiteracy, support from children for mobility, WWII, starvation, occupation, old age, not wasting food, memories of war

RL8_SE04, Sweden, Ylva: the car is my best support

Narrative

My name is Ylva, I am 53 years old, I live in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I was born with a spinal cord injury which means I have been in a wheelchair all my life. I have two children, both have now moved from home, my husband is also disabled. I work with disabled people professionally. Because of having been on sick leave due to fatigue symptoms I work 50 percent. To get to where I work, I need my car. I could carpool with someone, it might have worked as well. But then I work part-time, so there aren't that many people you can carpool with. We have two cars; my husband needs his most of the time since he can't walk at all.

I have periodically used the bus but not very much anymore. It wears on my shoulders to get to the bus stop, and it is not always so easy to get on to the bus. So, I use the car, unless I am out walking with someone, then I use my electric wheelchair or a normal wheelchair. So, I don't have a bike or anything like that. It doesn't work because my shoulders are so worn out. I can only lift things in and out of the car, so I'm quite limited based on that part. If we had lived closer to the bus stop, then I could have taken

the bus, I would prefer to go with the bus because then you can do other things, I would have listened to audiobooks. I hope the new buses [new buses to be installed in the city] will be easy to get on board if you are in a wheelchair, but I don't know, I have not heard anything about that.

So, I can't get on board a bus with my electric wheelchair, at least the one I have now, it is too big. It is designed for getting around in nature and can handle a more natural environment. I haven't even tried it on the bus, I must take my normal manual chair in that case. If I'm going out into the forest or I'm going to visit my sister, for example, who lives out in the countryside, then I connect a trailer to the car. I make sure I get my big electric wheelchair on to the trailer, there's a lot to bring. Again, you get to find your own balance that works and calculate what costs the most of your energy. But I've gotten so old that I've learned to ask for help. Before I had the capacity but not anymore, back then I was much more active and could roll myself longer. I used to be athletic and competed in para sport on the highest level. Even though I have had spinal cord injury since birth, my parents got me to do the same things as other kids, on my condition. They supported me to be as active as possible. From parasports and from my parents I learned that we could solve this and if you have that attitude, you can get far and then if there isn't a solution, then you must find one.

For me it is important to get more people who use wheelchairs to try para sports. At the same time, many disabled people who get aid get no training or education how to use the wheelchair, there is a need to strengthen this bit to get more people to become more mobile. It's like my mission in life is to teach people to use their wheelchair properly, but right now that's not something those who assist in trying out wheelchairs teach – it's not part of their job. The opportunity to learn to use a wheelchair isn't something you get that often, unfortunately, even though it is a big part of your everyday life. But it would make a difference. Then there are also other aspects to it. So, it works well for me to get out of the wheelchair to push it up the bus and so on. But if in such a situation you get out of the wheelchair as I can do and push it on to the bus, then you get a lot of very strange looks. Like, "why do we have a wheelchair if you can walk?" I can walk 2 meters with crutches, that it. People tend to think that if you are in a wheelchair, you're stuck. But sometimes people ask, and I explain, but I can't bear to explain myself all the time. I also got stares when I was a parent of small children, especially when in the wheelchair. I was asked questions if my daughter really my child and such.

I also have a dog that I train, and he help me retrieve stuff. He fetches my crutches, and he can get my shoes and he can carry things. But he also needs to be taken care of, so with the children moved out – they can no longer take him for a walk. It involves a lot of planning to take care of him nowadays. Above all it is stressful to see to that you can get home in time from work, this is also why I use the car instead of the bus to get to work. It was easier during corona when we had digital meetings much more, but now I need to be at work.

I want to live sustainably despite being car dependent. I have access to the transport I need. But I would like to get an electric engine to attach to my wheelchair, this way I can use the car less. I want to use the bus more, but I can't be sure I can get on and off, it depends on if I have a good day and have the strength and energy, so I don't. Not that I don't want to, the bus is also relaxing, then I don't need to drive, I can relax, talk to people, meet people from the area. Now I can't, instead I use the car that makes it

possible to get from door to door in a predictable way. I can also come home in time to my dog. But it does not feel good to use the car this much, because of the environment.

Quotes

[if] I can manage to roll myself to the bus stop. Then it would be quite nice to go by bus, both environmentally and in terms of time to be able to do something else in the meantime. It is above all that. But the car is one of my best aids and support. That's how it is. To really both bring stuff with me and yes, I can get close because there is usually disabled parking.

[...] so this with role models. It is extremely important. There, since nowadays since "a few 100 years ago" you go integrated [in school with children that are not disabled], it's not like you meet people [in wheelchairs] in schools, but, maybe it's there, only in para-sports or something that you can meet someone other [in wheelchair]

Oh, that guy looks like he is 10 years older than me, it looks like he is sitting in about the same wheelchair as I am and are doing that sport. Yes, but then maybe I can too..So it is an important part.

This very thing for children and young people and to get on with being able to dare to take the bus and with Kalle saying he takes the bus then maybe I can try it too. Maybe I can ask him how to do how he does can do the same.

When I had toddlers like that, could get questions "is that your child?" "No, I have the child in a carrier in the wheelchair, but it's not my child" (laughter) Yes, there have been many, many strange things that have happened.

Keywords

Disability, wheelchair, role models, prejudice, parenting while in wheelchair, unreliable public transport, parasport, dog

RL8_SE05, Sweden, Barbro: For a deafblind person lack of information is a major problem

Narrative

My name is Barbro, I am 48 years old, I live alone, and have no family of my own. I have deaf blindness and I live in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I usually walk or cycle to my workplace where I work in an office. I don't have my own car, I can use a transport service if needed. In my job I need to travel, it has decreased with the pandemic, but it is starting to increase. Now I'm going to southern parts of Sweden soon, by train, and tomorrow to Stockholm. When I visit relatives, I almost always take the train. I also plan to go abroad as part of my work - then there will be three people traveling, me and two interpreters. I rarely take the bus. It's not because I don't want to, but because it doesn't work very well. It's simply not my thing to ride the bus, it's not my style. I choose to walk or cycle if I can. I can't say that traveling environmentally friendly is an active choice, but I do think about the environment. Walking and cycling are something I enjoy doing. Then I may not always have a choice. When I travel, I always have company, it doesn't matter if I walk or cycle, most of the time, I have a personal assistant. If I must go somewhere without an assistant, then it will be a transport service. It works... but one difficulty with it is, since I have deaf blindness, getting information is difficult. I can buy tickets online, it works great over the internet - it was recently fixed. I can change and cancel orders via that internet service. But the problem is that I'm alone, so I can't get information about what happens during the journey. Maybe there are obstacles on the way, or the transport service needs to pick up another person, or whatever it may be. Then, I don't know if we have arrived at my destination or if it is that they are going to pick up and drop off someone else, and I think that becomes a problem for me. I don't get good information during the journey.

I enjoy walking and cycling, usually it's a good experience and a good feeling. Not just for me to get to a place, but I can feel good about walking and cycling this distance. A bad feeling that I have sometimes is as I said before that I almost always have someone with me. When I ride, I use a pair bike, not like a tandem, but two bikes put together. If I cycle, I have company, if I walk, I almost always have company. A bad feeling there is that the person who is my companion might not think it's so much fun, might think it's boring. Most people don't say anything, most of them work as personal assistants to me, and then it's part of their job to do so and then you might want to keep quiet and not say anything. "I feel that, that the other person thinks it's boring and that affects me, and then my experience is not as fun when I feel that I'm forcing someone to ride a bike or walk with me." I sometimes go by train, it depends on where I'm going and to what, why I'm going. Tomorrow I'm going by train, my assistant will accompany me to the train and make sure I get information before it leaves. Then I travel alone - then I have an interpreter on my arrival site. Maybe an interpreter will come along from Stockholm, I don't really know. I usually make sure that I have contact with the person who is going to see me when I arrive. I can use the app to follow the train on my mobile. I have found my own solution. There is not always a standard solution, but there can be many different solutions that you need to come up with. The train company sends text messages with traffic information, that function could be improved, with more informative during the journey. It is not consistent, not continuous information, more random. I would like that information regardless; technically impossible it shouldn't be. Few people with deaf blindness have regular gainful employment, many of my friends have very low income or have no income other than sickness benefit. If you have never worked, the level of sickness benefit will be very low. It may not only have a consequence on the way you travel or if you are able to

travel, but on the whole of everyday life. That it affects everything. So already today there are a lot of people who have big problems.

A person here in the city I live in, with whom I am close friends, the two of us have talked about this, for example if I have suggested that you should come with me to this, whatever it may be, it may just be to go out and eat or go to a café. But still, she replies that no, it's not possible, I have to think about how I use my money. It is not specifically related to travel, but it is more connected to everything. What will happen to these people then, if you say next year? I think it is already very difficult today.

Quotes

Transport service means carpooling with others, and I don't mind that, but I would like to know that it is a shared ride - that there is someone else coming with me or if the car will be empty. Or whether I should go directly to my destination or if we will take a detour. If they take a detour, I lose my orientation, I know the way from where I am to home, but if they take another route, I get very disoriented and confused.

The biggest problem is getting the information, it's not just for transport service and when there are train delays, but it can be in all sorts of situations. It is simply difficult to get hold of the information. I have found my own solution, but there is not always a standard solution, but there can be many different solutions that you need to come up with.

It was a week ago, I live quite close to the store, but a week ago I decided that I was going to the store further away. And I checked, it's 3.5 km to get there, for me it's not far at all, but just that day I had an assistant who I know is not very fond of cycling. [...] So, I thought that today I should be nice, so I said that today I'm going to that store and you can choose whether you want to walk or cycle, then she said quite honestly, "but cycling is really boring, so I choose to walk". But I think she still thought it was very far!

Keywords

Lack of information, assisted mobility, apps, deaf blindness, poverty, assistants for disabled, walking/cycling, trains

RL8_SE06, Sweden, Hillevi: others had their summer cottages, we had the car

Narrative



My name is Hillevi, and I am 80 years old I live in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I live in a very good area, near the city centre, and I can walk there. I never use the car to the city centre, but other than that, I use the car for all other things I do - like shopping from the grocery shop. It's hard to carry things otherwise – that I use the car for. I have a daughter who lives outside of the city with her children. I often go there, and it is almost impossible to go there by bus, it so often cancelled routes, and nothing is the same anymore. It's a problem for schoolchildren and everything, that it's not on time and they must leave too early or must wait for the bus, or you get late. So, I use my car to get there. My daughter is ill, and I take her to the hospital in my car when needed. It's been a lot lately, going to the doctors and hospital and so.

Other than that, I only do some leisure journeys. I have had a car since I was 25 years old. Me and my husband went on many trips. Just the thing to get out in nature with a coffee basket, that we did very much, we did that that the days just before he passed away. He was 90 years old. I feel happy when driving, it is a good feeling, but I don't go out in the forests anymore, you need to share it with someone you know. He was very keen to get out. We sat in snowstorm and in the rain and said, "we are probably the only ones in the world who sit in the woods and drink coffee in the rain inside a car". No long trips, only to get out, enjoy nature, the birds and animals. So, we have had great joy to have had the car. A bit of a luxury of course, we had two cars when I was married. It has always been there. But I am in that age that something can happen quickly that you can't drive anymore. You can't grieve for what hasn't happened, but of course I'm aware of it.

I don't use the bus; I haven't used the bus for many years. As a child I went by bus a lot, for eight years me and my sister took the bus from my home village to town. Now I must take a course to be able to, I think, don't know how to buy the tickets. I walk or I use the car. I walk if I need to then I don't need the bus. I don't cycle anymore, I am too insecure for that, and there are too many cars. I do care about the environment; I really think about that to reduce greenhouse emissions. I have an old regular petrol car, but I have replaced many parts to new ones in my car already.

The car is only the shell that is original, rest is upgraded, so I will keep it for as long as I can. I have not considered changing to an electric car. I don't know for how long I will drive, in my age you never know, I will keep my car if I can. I have not considered electrical cars, will the electricity last for all people who need to charge? Plus, they are expensive with very expensive batteries, so there are several question marks there.

During Corona we were out much less me and my husband, I guess it became lonely for all people who did not have a job to go to. Many worked from home, you avoided people, did not meet with people. I missed that, didn't we all? I think it still affects me, I avoid people in shops and so, don't want to have people close. Me and my husband could at least get out on excursions by car, there were no people there, only the animals. I don't do that anymore, it's not the same joy anymore, you don't have anyone to share it with. It is much less now. I have access to the transport I need, and I now take part in an organisation for active seniors in the city I live in – a lot of excursions and lectures. Usually I walk there, or we use a rented bus, a lot of social activities I can walk to.

I find the petrol prices increasing, it's the same for all, we have not seen the end of this yet. But its ok, I am not worried, I am old enough to know that you can't morn in advance. I have my head intact still; I hope someone tells me if I am not to drive anymore! I drive year around, then you remain alert with traffic and all. I have always enjoyed

driving, but I also like walking. I really believe that you need to use your legs and not only go short distances by car.

Quotes

[the bus] It's a problem for schoolchildren and everything, that it's not in time and they have to leave too early or have to wait for the bus or you get late. So that I use a car. [the car as adventure]

Sometimes you just fell on those gold nuggets, it's almost the most fun, when you find things along the way that many times people don't normally see, you just go by. Small roads, roads that get smaller and smaller, so you have to turn on a barn hill in the end. I've enjoyed it a lot. Others have had summer cottages. We went on our excursions.

I think the car traffic has gotten a little too nasty and too close somehow, and then I realise I'm not going out cycling. [...] There is too much car traffic, you are too unprotected, I think. So that no, I've stopped, I'd rather walk.

Keywords

Care trips, escape vehicle, bus, walking, cycling, widow, electric car, access nature

RL8_SE07, Sweden, Sonja: I am visually impaired, but I cycle to remain independent

Narrative

My name is Sonja, I am 55 years old, I live in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I work with disability issues professionally. I have two grown-up children. I was born with a visual impairment which meant that I cannot drive a car. This in turn means that I can't live in the rural areas even though I wanted to. I have felt forced to live in the city, currently I live 10 minutes from the city centre if you cycle and 25 minutes if you walk. I am a bit of a "reversed" person with regards to emissions. It turned out that this pandemic was really quite positive for me because working from home was incredibly well for me considering my visual impairment. So, on my computer, I can regulate for myself how close or far away I want to be on screen. If in a meeting room I have difficulties seeing other persons, but at home with the computer I can. And then it's like I'm so tired of this stuff trying to get

around by bus. It's kind of impossible. We still live so centrally in the city that half of the time is spent getting to and from the bus stop itself so that, you can say that I ride my bike everywhere. And maybe that's at the verge of what I'm capable of, but I'll do it anyway. So it happens that I go to work 6 km one way then I go by bike. I cycle to the store, I do that quite often, sometimes I get a ride. But when I cycle, I usually have two bike baskets in the back and then I have a bike basket in the front and then I can have two bags on either side of the handlebars. When I come with my shopping cart people help me if I need assistance to load the groceries.

I am used to taking care of myself. As a teenager I used to go by bus, but then you had to cope with the stress and meet timetables and so on. I think it was like this that I lived when I was growing up, I lived nine km outside the city. And I practiced swimming nine times a week. So, I kind of got on that damn bus first to school and then back home most of the time and then to swim class. And then you'd run with wet hair and icicles sort of off to the bus stop. The worst thing was that you had to catch the bus back home after swimming practice in the evenings at half past 10. We swam between half past eight and ten in the evening so then you wanted to go home to sleep, then had to get up again in time for morning practice. I was sitting on that bus so much during those years. I don't have a social phobia or anything like that that really hinders me, but that thing about fitting bus timetables is the worst thing I know. I want to have control. Still, I am dependent on my husband to go places by car. If I could drive, I probably would have, and then polluted more. In the weekends we go by car to the county side and up to the mountains, but I can only do that if my husband is driving.

Now the car is parked most of the time, my husband cycles and I too.

My son lives' up north and to visit him is more complicated since I don't drive. I could go by train and let them pick me up or go to Norway and change there. But since I have a dog I would need to put the dog in quarantine in Norway, so that is more complicated. I might have gone see him more often if I would be allowed transport service, but for that I would need to be almost blind. This makes me dependent on my husband or someone else to drive me.

When my daughter was living at home I could not do as many other parents did, take my child to practice by car. I kind of couldn't contribute to that as a parent. But instead of me taking the kids in a car, I cycled instead. We had bike trailers they were the kids are born in the early 1990s, so I think I was a bit almost a forerunner there too. I've chosen the right husband who never says no if I ask him, of course he will drive me. It's never the case that he sighs that it's complicated that I see badly or something like that, because I just couldn't stand that.

I think I go by bike or walk every day, but I have neighbours around here who rides their cars all the time to work, back and forth. Then you can get a little annoyed because they have no further to work than I do. I think that's a bit bad, honestly.

Quotes

I'm maybe one of those who would really like to emit a little more carbon dioxide than I actually do.

That's kind of the hardest part. Because I want to be an independent woman who lives my own life and asking for help is a bit complicated. I don't want to be a nuisance; I want to fend for myself. Then I might rather forgo that trip to the market in [place], which I might have wanted to go on or so.

It's probably the same thing there that I somehow want to be independent. I want to decide for myself when to move or go somewhere or so, it is possible for me to ride the bus just like for everyone else. But that's the thing about the control, I think, and I know that then maybe I don't really see what the number on the bus is and then I'm going to stand there with some little binoculars and check like what does it say?

Keywords

Visual impairment, cycling, striving for independence, mobility and parenthood, public transport as time consuming

RL8_SE08, Sweden, Tomas: disabled people should not be segregated

Narrative

My name is Tomas, I am 44 years old. I live in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I am in a wheelchair and have severely low eyesight. I live alone but have an assistant who helps me in daily life. I am part of two organisations for disabled people.

In my everyday travel I usually go by bus or transport service for longer trips. I don't have a car, usually I can go wherever I want by bus or train, so I don't need a car. I like to be physically active. For vacation I go by plane to southern Europe, but not the last couple of years because of Covid. The pandemic made travel harder, very much so. Some people did not want to take part of the sports activities and such. I did not want to travel and could not take part in sports as I used to, so I set up my own home gym instead. I go by train when in Sweden, usually for meetings in the organisations I am part of. Nowadays I can do a lot of those meetings from home. I use transport service to some extent but try to avoid it. Now it's more common for disabled people to use the bus or train, it's not something that surprises people so much. Before it was more like we should be invisible, and go with special transport service, now we are more part of society. For me this is important that we are treated like everybody else, that we also can take the bus and are not getting special treatment. I know that some organisations are hesitant since it can be turned against us, like "ok so you can use the bus, you don't need transport service". But I am using both and think both should be available as options.

For me public transport is a way to travel environmentally friendly, something you do with others, not like travel in separate cars [as is the case with transport service]. It is also a social aspect to public transport that you can engage in social interactions when on the bus. On transport service this is less of an option since you are facing forward all the time, and you can't interact with the people behind you. You don't know anything about that person. This is different if you are on a train or bus, you can see the person in question. But I'm quite tall and often must sit in the front seat of the transport service - then you simply don't see the person you're talking to.

There is an attitude still, that we are kept separate in transport. In the past, many people were surprised when you went by bus instead of the transportation service, it was like you were supposed to take transportation service to get from point a to point b. My assistant and I know how to get on the bus. This is not always the case as the bus driver have learned that you are to reverse on to the bus, but I don't like it. Me and my assistant push me forward, and then the chauffeur tells you not to do that. A concern with the bus is how to get on board, usually it is ok, but sometimes you need the driver to install a ramp for you to enter. This feels not so good. In other countries, such as Spain, the ramp is underneath the bus and can be installed automatically. This feels much better since you are not dependent upon another person to do that for you. I think that is a much better system. When abroad, I try to test their public transport system to see how it works. It has worked well mostly. Instead of flying down to Spain, trains can be an option, but you don't know how it will work with the trains. It would be nice to know that it works from point a to point b, which trains that are accessible or not, not everyone knows how it works.

My upbringing has thought me to be inclusive and spread knowledge that it is possible to be disabled and still travel like other people do. To show we can all do it. Us disabled people should not be segregated. Disability organisations are sometimes afraid to lose transport service though. I know in Stockholm; blind people get less or no transport service since they are supposed to take the subway instead. For me, to have an assistant is important to be able to go by bus or cycle. If I would not have an assistant, I would be much more dependent upon transport service since I can't get to the bus stop safely. Ticket prices matter too, free bus fares would have advantages, but it did not turn out so well when it was tested in the city I live in. I got to know about the bus from the regional bus company, they had a drive to get people that where allowed transport service to go by bus for free. For me the best is to have access to both bus and transport service. I know that disabled people are afraid that they would lose their right to transport service. For me, a concern is not being able to use the bus for some reason, I want to be able to choose between bus and transport service.

Quotes

[About traveling with disabilities] People are not surprised anymore in the same way [as before]. Before you should sit in a national transport service bus and should not be seen, but nowadays more people are out in the community. Before, you would take a transportation service bus, but now I use the train.,

As we disabled people have been refused national transport service, we have realised that the train works. We've taken that step as well. It's on us, too. We have seen that

transportation service is not the only option available. That's something I think is great. I just don't like this special treatment.

I think it becomes a social interaction [in public transport], that you are not alone. That you can talk to someone with those who are sitting nearby. That's kind of what we Swedes need to get a little better at, to change our social behaviour as well.

I'm severely visually impaired, so I feel like a traffic hazard if I'm riding a bike, so I have the bike attached to a trainer. My front wheel is in a trainer, so I ride more virtually than being on the track. But I get up to the same speeds as that on the track. That's what's so great about it that you can connect via Bluetooth.

Keywords

Attitudes, transport service, public transport, equal access, equal treatment, choice, disabled being visible, public transport a public space

RL8_SE09, Sweden, Lars: low income and not daring is a hinder

Narrative

My name is Lars, I am 53 years old and single I live in a middle-sized city in Sweden. I have a disability which means that I use a wheelchair for transport outdoors. I don't have a job. On a normal day I am mostly at home, a couple of times a week I travel. For example, I use the train to go protesting in other cities, for the rights for disabled people. To travel I first see that my electric wheelchair is charged, it is adjusted for public transport, I live close to the train station. To get on to the train usually works well, I do need assistance by the train attendant to raise the front wheels of the wheelchair, so they don't get stuck between the train and the platform. Normally there is a ramp, but I don't need it. There are too few places on the trains that are reserved for wheelchairs. If there are several people in wheelchairs it gets crowded fast, it is not expected that people in wheelchairs travel together.

If traveling locally in the city I live in, I use a three wheeled e-scooter which is faster than the electric wheelchair, I use it for shopping and all other transportation within central

areas of the city. I can't bring it on trains or buses since it is too big, and for that I need to use my electric wheelchair. I have difficulties with curbs, most of the time there are no problems with access when using these wheelchairs, but there may be problems if the curbs are not levelled.

I belong to those in the disability community that really use public transport. In the city I live in, there have been problems where people in electrical wheelchairs have been refused permission to board the bus although their aids have been approved for use on buses. It has been due to the driver's ignorance, and we are trying to remedy it now. We have tested how accessible the buses are for disabled people to educate and get an acceptance by the drivers, so this became a project with the regional bus company. We have ridden around, and we've reported every trip. There have been very little treatment problems, we reckoned we'd get in more trouble than we got. It's more about getting those in wheelchairs to dare to use the bus. I know what the rules are and can tell the driver this, but people say I am unique. But I feel it has become harder and harder to get access to transport. It is more difficult to access the transport service for example and I need it to travel longer distances in Sweden. I can't change trains for example.

I travel sustainably, both my vehicles are electric. Then it is up to the person who arranges the transport whether it has a customised vehicle to realise the transport. It's not something that I as a user can have any views on, I think. If you look at modern climate-smart transport for those of us with disabilities, it is about trains and public transport must become accessible. And then the question on longer trips is what is accessibility? Is it about me being able to get from point a to point b within the same time frame and the same cost. Or is it that every vehicle must be accessible? I think what needs to be done to improve the whole situation about travel is that there should be regulations that I should be able to contact a travel agent and mediate my needs and where I want to travel, then the organiser of the trip should make sure that I get there in the same time frame as non-disabled people. For me, accessibility is to be entitled to the same service and right to travel as non-disabled people according to their needs, the goal is not about accessibility to specific means of transport. I shouldn't have to pay more because I'm dependent on an adapted vehicle than the one that isn't. It costs SEK 80 round trip to go to an association meeting if you go with transportation service, the same trip costs for those who do not have transportation service SEK 56. I think that is unreasonable discrimination. Most people who live with sick pay have about SEK 3000 a month, so you can think about what it means yourself. However, many associations pay for the trips for board meetings. I think that only when the income support has been increased to 75-80 percent of a normal salary, then we can start traveling like other people. Today we cannot afford to travel. The fact that I get out as much as I do, that's what makes the Social insurance agency want to question my health insurance. It has become so much more difficult to be disabled in Sweden in the last 20 years since everything must be investigated, and condition assessed by the Social Insurance Agency.

Quotes

You save some money, but you save money on ruining people's lives.



It's more about getting the person in a wheelchair to dare. It is enough for a one driver to deny the wrong person at one point, then it will be a lot of talk about it and will be in the media and then people will be afraid and do not dare to try.

I can't make a living from my involvement in disability organisations, but the Swedish Social Insurance Agency is on me and wants to reduce my sickness benefits, it put itself on the psyche in the end.

One visually impaired person described it this way, 'before I could go out and be among people, now I get herded a few hours now and then'. So that, the Swedish disability policy is a disaster.

As it is now, it works great with escorting if it goes according to schedule, but as soon as there is trouble, it makes things difficult for people with disabilities. Because the support does not come along.

My biggest fear is that the current disability policy will lead to us being as trapped as we were in the time of mental hospitals.

Keywords

Swedish Social Insurance Agency, sickness benefits, wheelchairs and public transport; train, mobility rights, access, income, disability, social welfare policy

RL8_SE10, Sweden, Nina: mandatory laws are needed

Narrative

My name is Nina, I live centrally in a middle-sized Swedish city, relatively close to my workplace. It's about 3 km to work, and I use different travel modes to get there. I live with my husband and teenage son. I am in a wheelchair. I can stand up and walk a little if I have support, outside I only move with help. I use my electric wheelchair as much as I can.

I have also got help from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency aid to adapt a car. Previously we had an electric hybrid which we thought worked really well, but I had to be able to bring my e-scooter and wheelchair in the car, so I applied for this from the Insurance Agency and they made demands on what type of car I should have. So, we went from having driven in an electric hybrid car, to driving a big big diesel car. Because

the bigger diesel car was the only car, we were allowed to buy for the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. They have certain requirements; the car must last for ten years to make an adjustment and certain requirements that I should also be able to travel with the car and bring my aids. But it could have gone with different regulation I think, so that's a bit of what I'm on the warpath with and which I really want to convey. Since both me and my husband work full time we can afford such an expensive car, it needs to be new, and associated with other demands, so you get to pay tax on diesel, plus the exhausts from diesel is no good at all, and in the current transition, there will no longer be any diesel cars in the future – I hope! So, this is a problem I think, especially since you have put a lot of energy and money in adapting a car to your needs.

But the transport service works very bad, it is rarely on time, it is difficult to order. So, this one time when I and my friend who has got deaf blindness were going to a place up north, and both of us have transport service, they can't coordinate this trip – for some reason – then there are two cars going from similar locations to this city back and forth. Lots of excusals and lots of waste! When I am out with my son I try as best I can to use my e-scooter and he cycles, and we use the car as little as possible, of course. I also work in a city 200 km away from here, so if I am going there, it is very difficult, involving lots of changes of trains on the way there. If you are in a wheelchair and need to bring a bag and weak in the body makes train changes very hard. One does not know if the elevators will work or not at the train station, so I prefer to go by car if I must be there on a specific time. Much better is the e-scooter, it is supported by the Region, and it is very good. Reasonably fast, you can go indoors and outdoors with it, easy to charge.

Before that I walked or went in my hybrid car, so when I got worse, I got a bit more environmentally sustainable since I got my e-scooter. And when we go grocery shopping, I go together with my husband and we can load the scooter and he on his bike, so we choose to go together instead of him going with the car by himself. Because we want to use the car as little as possible.

Bus, I don't think I can get on the bus with the wheelchair, I don't know. That's why I got transport service and has been approved that.

So, when flying it works fine, you get free of charge assistance and then you get to fill out a form showing what support you need. It's very smooth. If I were to fly from Stockholm Arlanda, then we would take the car, and I would be allowed to use a parking that does not cost much – for disabled people. Before I used to fly a lot more, I don't do that anymore unless I really must.

I think that we are facing a big crisis, we are in the middle of a crisis, and at the same time my everyday life needs to work as far as possible. Structures can make things easier; it needs to be easy to choose what is right. So, for me to be more sustainable the Insurance agency needs to change their regulations on what car you can choose, and from a policy perspective you need to prioritise environmental aspects. Even though we make such a large investment and for a period of 10 years, and environmental considerations are not even there at all. This is serious. Build train connections that are easily accessible and available, with the full journey taken into consideration – from buying the ticket to getting the elevator – but then there is a need for more integration between different bodies in the transport system. That would make it easier to choose right. Also snow towing between my home and work, it is prioritised. This is a structural aspect that has been taken into consideration. To go around in my big diesel car feels hard, it's not fun at all, but at the same time it needs to work. But one also tries to do other

things for the environment, so it feels bad to travel in a way that is not good for the environment since you know it is totally reprehensible. So, I can get the question “why do you drive a diesel car?”, even though you have been forced into it and would not have chosen one normally. I hope there will be more environmentally friendly cars in the future. But I will be stuck with my environmentally bad car. We are facing huge environmental problems and need to change this. I charge my scooter with good conscience. The whole family stands by this. We have really changed during the last 6 months, we have read up, but I am comfortable, I am all for imperative regulations for change.

During Covid I worked much more from home. After the covid pandemic, people have become much better to organise meetings online, they are more aware, and they got the skills to do it. This is a great asset, I don't have to go places to meet, I can also initiate meetings on distance – something I was hesitating to do before since it put me in the spot as lazy and not wanting to travel – but now I can point to environmental aspects instead. Not that people question it, it works well, and people are used to it. It's a win for me both environmentally and functionally.

Quotes

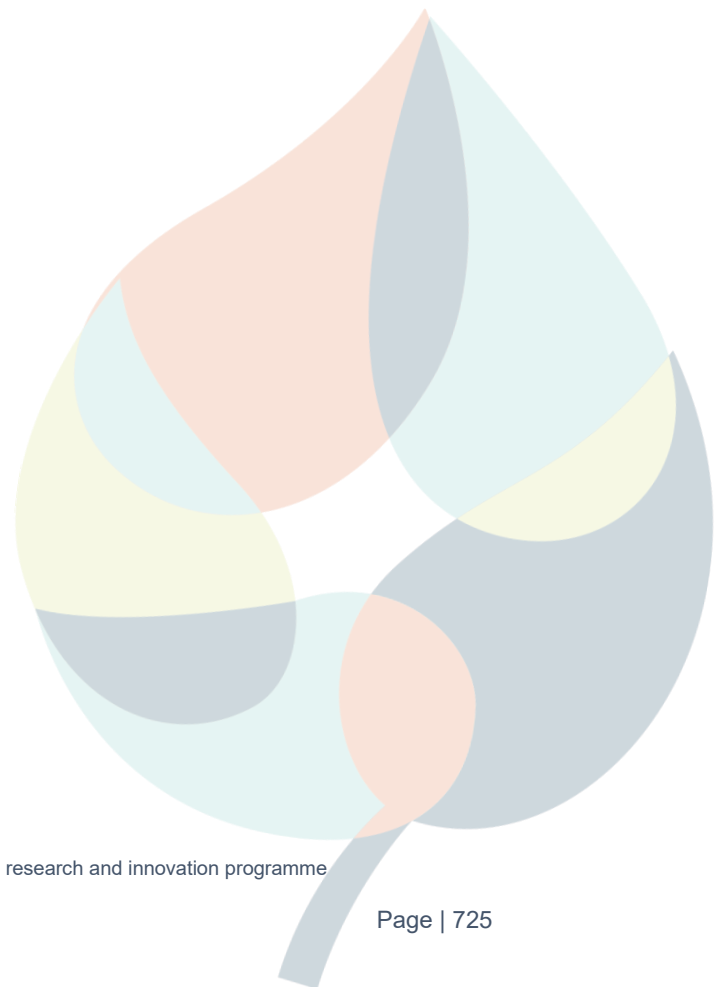
So, from having driven in an electric hybrid, we now drive in a big big diesel car. Because the [diesel car] was the only car we were allowed to buy for the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. They have certain requirements; it must last for ten years to make an adjustment and certain requirements that I should also be able to travel with the car and bring my aids. But it could have gone with different regulation, so that's a bit of what I'm on the warpath with and which I really want to convey.

If you have a wheelchair and have to carry a bag with you and wobble around a bit and are weak, then the train changes become very difficult and you have to go up and down and the elevator doesn't work, for example. It has happened quite a few times, Järnhusen is responsible for the platforms around the trains, while SJ and other forums are responsible for the actual journey with the train, so there can also be a problem there. Then you are unsure if you will arrive on time, and if you have a lecture to give yourself, I prefer to go by car because I don't know if the lifts at the central station are working or not. And if they don't work, it takes half a day to get things sorted.

Partly if you arrive, or arrive at all, or if you arrive on time. And if there is a problem, you must call a special number that SJ [train operator] has and there is often quite a long queue.

Keywords

Car dependency, Swedish Social Insurance Policy, regulations, diesel car, e-scooter, travel assistance, disability and trains



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