



LESSON 5

CONSUMER SOCIETY AND WASTE

Introduction

When the ruler of Uno planet Sophia arrives in Earth, she does not know what a consumer society is. She is curious to know why consumption has become a problem for the inhabitants of our planet.

(Chapter V - New York: Capital of Luxury and Waste - The Mission to Planet Earth in Sofia / Sophia 's Mission on Planet Earth).

What is the consumer society?

We are part of the consumer society. People who live according to certain habits, values and rules. We are of different races, cultures and religions, but we can live with the same value: consumption. So we can say that all those who value the consumption are part of this "consumer society".

The consumer society is based on manufacturing products to be purchased and then consumed or used. All these products come from nature because we have not yet learned to do magic and make a product from scratch.

According to a research done by United Nations, the number of consumers in the world has reached 1.7 billion people. This number will increase when the poorest people improve their lives and start to buy more as well.

The shoes we wear, the cell we use to talk and the paper we write on, all come from nature and its biodiversity. The shoes are made of cow leather, cell phone is made of metal found in the nature and paper everyone knows that is made from trees like eucalyptus.

After use, these products end up in trash, but in a way you can not reintegrate these products with nature. Where to dispose all the waste of the products we consume?

In Brazil, about 76% of the waste or 70 million pounds a day are thrown anywhere without protection in open ground. Only 10% of the waste we produce goes to controlled landfills and 9% goes to landfills. Recycling in the country is still small, around 3%, but selective collection is increasing and the trend is to recycle more.

Waste

All that has no further use is WASTE. When we do not want something or when it ceased to serve us, we think of it as junk.

The toothbrush that gets old after a certain time has to be thrown away. The tooth paste in the tube can be completely consumed, but the tube goes to waste. We can use any soap, but the foam going along with the water goes down the drain in the bathroom.

We need food to live, but we do not always make use of food leftovers, scraps, peels, and what have been ruined due to the expiration date, etc. All this is rubbish or waste - the part that remains of something that was bigger.

There are several types of garbage, but let us separate the waste into three main types:

Wet Waste (or Organic)

Remains of food and skins, fruits and vegetables.

Dry Waste

Scrap paper, plastic, metal, glass, rubber, concrete, leather etc.

Toxic Waste

It is trash that could harm our health: batteries, expired medicines, syringes, needles and all medical waste. Some products we use at home are as toxic repellents, detergents and fertilizers for plants.

This garbage is done by us humans to supply our needs. So you can see that we are always producing waste in our lives. The problem is what to do with this amount of waste.

This waste can also be divided into two types:

Recycle Waste

It is waste which can make for recycling. This waste will turn into raw material to make more products or even an entirely new product.

The organic waste or food scraps can be turned into fertilizer for plants.



For example, aluminum can be melted to make new aluminum cans.

A plastic bottle can turn into yet another product, such as a broom.



Non-recyclable Waste

Garbage you that you can not take advantage of.
This garbage will be buried and in landfills.

Why is the volume of waste increasing?

The world population is increasing with more people being born. These people need things to live and that is why the demand and trash increase.

Another problem is that what we buy comes with a lot of packaging: plastic, paper, styrofoam, foam etc. If you buy a TV, you arrange a place for it, but the rest has to be thrown in the garbage piled up somewhere.

The problem is that environment is not prepared to receive so much junk. The more you buy, the more waste you produce. Since we can not stop buying what we need, we must find a way to solve this problem and for that we must remember the 3Rs!

The three Rs: Reduce waste, reuse and recycle.

First of all, we should not have garbage. Every day we throw away a lot that could we don't need or could be reused or recycled. These are the three Rs that should be part of our lives, just like brushing teeth, bathing and eating.

We need many things in our daily lives as toothpaste to brush our teeth, soap for bathing and food. What we should take in account is that these things have leftovers and almost everything becomes trash.

Each year we produce millions of tons of durable products waste and nondurable goods waste. Longer lasting durable products are cars, furniture, computers, blenders, tires etc. The non-durable products have a short life as paper, soap and clothing. The longer a product lasts, the longer it will take to be thrown in the trash. The longer it takes to a product to be thrown away, the better is for nature that retains its natural resources
Natural resources are materials drawn from nature to make the products we need as eucalyptus pulp to make paper. The more paper we use, the more we have to plant eucalyptus trees, but you can not plant eucalyptus on the entire planet. We need space to grow rice and raise cattle to provide milk, meat, cheese for the population. We need to save paper, reuse what we can and recycle what can be recycled. What can not be repaired or recycled, then will have to go to waste.

All the things we throw in the garbage go somewhere on our planet, where before there was only nature. This place can be a dump or a landfill. The dump is a place where garbage is piled, all messy and nothing on top. In landfill, the waste is covered by layers of earth and treated not to be unhealthy.

Ideally we should make an effort to reduce the amount of waste and so we need less space to put all the garbage mountain. We have seen in Sophia's Mission on Planet Earth that New York City does not have anymore a place to store its trash and it is sent to another city. But if other places are no longer able to keep it as well, what will happen?



It is therefore very important to start with the first R to reduce waste. The next step is the second R of reusing and finally the third R to recycle.

Reducing waste

To begin, we can make the most of our meal. Let's put on the plate only what we want to eat. Then we will take the leftovers of foods such as bark, stems and other waste. Did you know that the leaves of broccoli can make a delicious soup? And that banana peels can become a very tasty cake?

Another option is to use peel vegetables and fruits to make an organic compound that can be used as fertilizer for house plants, condominium, school or company.

When we throw something out, we should think that we have spent money and energy to do these things and now a part of this money is going out. If we reduce waste, we will at the same time protect the environment and save money.

Recycling waste

Every product has a lifecycle. A cycle means a process that has a beginning, a middle and an end and a new beginning.

A life cycle of a product is the time that this product will last since it leaves the factory still it can not be used anymore for some reason.

When a product has a short life cycle it does not last long. If a product has a long life cycle it will last long enough. Ideally, the product cycle will not end and it can be re-cycled, meaning it will go through a new cycle.

Today we know that many products like soda cans of and alcoholic beverages are recyclable. They are made of aluminum and can be harnessed to make more aluminum cans. Recycling cans is a good deal: it is cheaper to use cans than to extract aluminium to do new cans.

If you throw away a soda can, it will take 100 years to decompose. Many people drink soda cans and do not make the correct disposal of them. In this way, nature will get clogged up with aluminum cans.

A lot can be recycled and we can even build a house made of waste bricks. This is the real advantage because in addition to recycling waste, we are creating an opportunity for workers to earn money.

Reusing what was going to waste

To begin with, do not throw away anything that can be repaired: bicycle, lamp, computer, or shoes.

An old sock going set aside to go into the garbage can be reused. We can sew it and give it to someone who has no socks. We can also use it as cleaning cloth.

The wood waste can be harnessed to make crafts: a toolbox, for example, or a table rest. Finally, there are many ways to make the most of what was going to be thrown away.

Do we have to stop consuming?

We can not stop consuming, but we must know how to do it wisely and avoid waste.

Why buy a new bike if yours is still working? She'll get older too. We can save this money for something that we really need or put in savings for what we need in the future.

What is ecological footprint?

Ecological footprint is a measure that has been invented to calculate how much a person consumes or buy things that use nature's resources. It measures the amount of land and water we occupy to produce what we consume of bread, milk, cars, houses, etd. So we can calculate how much we are using from nature.

Scholars say that we are consuming 20% more than the Earth is able to give us. If we continue to consume at this speed, natural resources will end. We need to decrease the amount of things we buy and also better distribute the wealth we produce.



What can we do to pollute less?

First, it is very important to save resources. When we waste food or electricity we are spending nature's resources that take time to be replaced. We are also throwing money away. We need to consume or buy things that we can really take advantage of. We need to take care of our planet.

Below is the list of what we can do, according to the situations of our daily life.

To get from one place to anothe:

- Walk or bicycle use.
- Use public transportation: trains, subways, buses.
- If you use the car, preferring to fill the tank with alcohol that pollutes less than gasoline.
- Traveling on vacation to places nearby that do not need much fuel.

Note: Plane is the means of transport that uses more fuel and contributes most to the harmful emissions of greenhouse gases. The greenhouse gas emissions can be offset by planting trees.

At home:

- Turn lights out if there is nobody in the room
- Turn off appliances when not in use
- Talk with family and friends about consumption and the environment
- Eat fresh produce from their garden or a garden near your home
- Use leftover fruit and vegetable peelings to make fertilizer for plants and garden.

In shopping

- Buy only what you need
- Buy products from companies who care about the environment and education
- Refuse unnecessary packaging
- Take the shopping cart or green bag when we go shopping at the supermarket or shops.
- Prefer paper bags to plastic ones.
- Buy vegetables without plastic or styrofoam tray.

ALWAYS:

- Separate your rubbish for recycling. At work, on the street or at home, throw garbage in the selective collection points.
- Use the front and back of the paper and save dozens of trees
- Save Water

The small initiatives can make a big difference if we think we are a network of individuals living in society, and we can influence other with our good examples.

Before printing think about your responsibility to the planet.

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