

Forum: Youth Assembly

Issue: Tackling the issue of overconsumption

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INTRODUCTION

Our society is based on the use of natural resources such as water and energy. It is evident that over the years, humanity's demanding needs have grown even further, leading to the overuse of those natural resources. This overuse has destructive consequences to the environment and the planet as a whole. One of the most severe effects overconsumption has caused is climate change. As commonly known, the international society has experienced severe weather phenomena during the past few years because of climate change. Apart from that, fertile land has been destroyed, the number of forests has drastically decreased and both water reserves and fish stocks are shrinking due to overconsumption. All in all, because the total environmental damage caused by overconsumption is hard to count, experts support that the planet will soon be declared as inhabitable. To avoid that, our lifestyle, as well as our life choices, need to change, and become more sustainable.

Apart from the environmental sector, the consequences that overconsumption has on humanity are catastrophic as well. As mentioned before, society needs natural resources in order for it to function properly. Shall these resources run out; humanity will be faced with many severe problems, one of the most severe ones being water shortage. Water is vital for every human and if it becomes extinct due to its overuse, many lives will be lost. Apart from that, there are many consequences as far as the economic sector is concerned. Numerous businesses have collapsed during the past years and have had to face the catastrophic effects of producing items that consumers can not afford to buy and therefore create a tremendous amount of waste.



Overconsumption ¹

The consumer's tendency of always purchasing more products and services than what they actually need is another major factor that has contributed to overconsumption. Unnecessary

¹ "Χριστούγεννα σε Καραντίνα ~ Spiritual Cluster." Spiritual Cluster, 19 Dec. 2020, www.spiritualcluster.gr/xristougenna-karantina/.

products and services often end up unused, and most of the time they are not even recycled. The amount of the waste created is tremendous and harmful towards the environment.

Taking all these key factors as well as consequences into consideration it is obvious that overconsumption is an issue that needs to be tackled as soon as possible. To achieve that, people from all around the world should help and contribute to this common goal.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Overconsumption²

Overconsumption is the act of buying/taking more than you need, or even over using something, and can happen with anything. It describes a situation, where the extreme use of the earth's natural resources has led to the near extinction of these resources. An example of overconsumption is overexploitation, which is defined as the consumer's tendency to overuse earths renewable sources to the point where they can no longer be renewed. This is destructive for the planet, the environment, and the economy of every society.

Sustainable living

Under the term sustainable living falls the lifestyle, which consists of the reduced use of earth's natural resources. In that way, the protection of the earth and of the more fragile ecosystems is achieved. That is of the utmost importance during the environmental crisis that the planet experiences currently and therefore it is of vital importance that sustainable lifestyle becomes a way of living for the modern society.

Natural resources³

Natural resources are materials from earth which are being used for mankind's needs. Any natural substance that humans use can be considered as a natural resource, and they are either renewable or non-renewable, living or fossil fuels. Oil, coal, natural gas, metals, stone, and sand are natural resources. Resources such as air, sunlight, soil and as well as animals, birds, fish and plants are natural resources as well.

Climate Change⁴

² "Definition of OVERCONSUMPTION." Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-trusted Online Dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/overconsumption.n

³ SCDHEC, www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/OR-0689.pdf.

⁴ "What Is Climate Change?" NASA Climate Kids, www.climatekids.nasa.gov/climate-change-meaning/.

Climate change describes the situation, where there are changes in the average conditions, temperatures and rainfalls of the earth. Climate change has increased during the past few decades, due to many human behaviors and factors such as overpopulation. A great example of climate change is the melting of the ice in Antarctica. Due to the rising temperatures icebergs are collapsing the sea levels have already significantly risen. As it is evident, climate change is a phenomenon, which causes long-term changes over the entire earth.

Fast Fashion⁵

Fast Fashion is a term used to describe the act of quickly removing clothing items from the catwalk shows to the stores, so that clothing businesses profit in faster tenses. Most of the times, the items are sold in very low prices and this fact urges the consumer to buy more goods only because of the affordable prices. On the downside, Fast Fashion is directly associated with extreme waste and pollution. Apart from that, the workers in those industries are faced with extremely low wages as well as inhumane working conditions.

Black Friday⁶

Historically, Black Friday was a stock market catastrophe documented on September 24th, 1869. Currently, Black Friday is the first Friday following Thanksgiving Day in the United States. During this day, items are sold under excessive sales and therefore consumers tend to purchase an overwhelming amount of goods and services. It is recorded that Black Friday has been the busiest shopping day of each year for the past fifteen years in the United States.

Source input⁷

Source input indicates power or energy put into a machine or system for storage, conversion in kind, or conversion of characteristics usually with the intent of sizable recovery in the form of output. More or less, Source Input refers to data or information being passed into a computer machine.

Mass media⁸

Mass media is a term used to describe the means through which a mass audience could be reached. Its primarily purpose is to communicate with the vast majority or the general public. Some of those most common means of communication are the Internet, the newspaper, the

⁵ "How Fast Fashion Works." Investopedia, www.investopedia.com/terms/f/fast-fashion.asp.

⁶ "Black Friday." Investopedia, www.investopedia.com/terms/b/blackfriday.asp.

⁷ "Input Source Definition | English Definition Dictionary | Reverso." Dictionary, Translation | French, Spanish, German | Reverso, www.dictionnaire.reverso.net/english-definition/input+source.

⁸ "What Is Mass Media? - Definition, Types, Influence & Examples." Study.com, www.study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-mass-media-definition-types-influence-examples.html.

television and the radio. Mass media aims to spread information and news from all around the world to the public and inform them about up today topics.

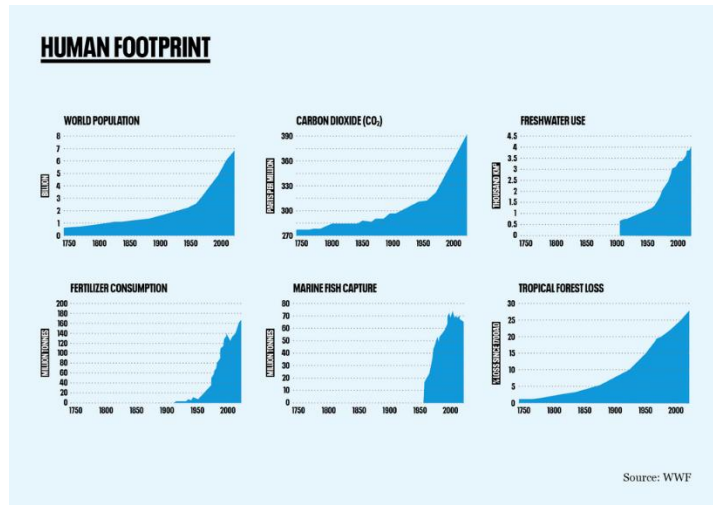
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Key factors leading to overconsumption

There are many factors that lead to overconsumption. For example, fast fashion shops promote the ideology of constantly renewing one's belongings as soon as the trends shift. Apart from that, advertisements on mass media encourage the buyer to consume more and more goods and purchase even more services, despite them being unnecessary. The extremely low prices urge the consumers to buy more items than initially planned. However, once the consumers realize that they do not "need" these items, they most likely throw them away. By doing so, waste is created, and the phenomenon of overconsumption continues to harm the planet. The annual event "Black Friday" is another catastrophic example of overconsumption. Black Friday encourages the overconsumption of non-essential goods since all items are on sale and consumers tend to buy many useless items only due to their low prices. As mentioned before, this will create a tremendous amount of waste. One other main factor leading to overconsumption is economic growth. To sustain their growth, not only industries and businesses but entire companies as well require a greater source input, which comes from renewable sources. A great example is People's Republic of China (China). By 1983, China's consumption surpassed the biocapacity of their natural resources, leading to overconsumption⁹. Of course, this fact had terrible effects on China's environment, such as increased pollution, land degradation and non-renewable resource depletion.

The effects of overconsumption

⁹ "Analysis of Over-consumption of Natural Resources and the Ecological Trade Deficit in China Based on Ecological Footprints." ScienceDirect.com | Science, Health and Medical Journals, Full Text Articles and Books, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1470160X15005956.



Overconsumption affects both individuals and society as a whole. Taking into consideration that the economy is built around natural resources like trees, gas, oil, metal ores, water and fertile land, their overuse will lead to their extinction. Therefore, if the worldwide problem of overconsumption continues to take place and people end up losing their resource basis, society will be faced with issues almost impossible to face.

Apart from that, overconsumption is one of the main causes of the current environmental crisis. As a consequence, entire ecosystems are destroyed and animals become extinct. To this environmental crisis, one should also take the gas emissions produced by the vehicles in the city and the substances produced by the burning of gasoline into serious consideration. As previously mentioned, overconsumption has life-threatening consequences on individuals as well. It is evident that if polluted air is being inhaled, humans face many medical problems, which are mostly lung affiliated.

Overconsumption has a disastrous effect on international inequality as well. For example, people in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) live under inhumane conditions and that is because of the water shortage. More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs)

Evidence of excessive human footprints in many sectors, including the rise in world population, CO₂ emissions, Marine life captures, and Tropical Forest losses.

continuously overuse water for their own profit, creating much waste and therefore making it impossible for individuals of LEDCs to live with a very limited amount of water. Due to this water shortage almost 500 children die

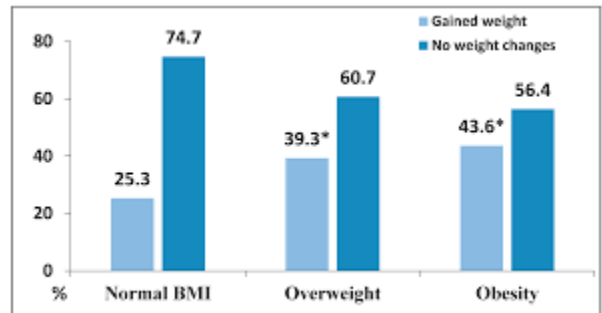
in Africa on a daily basis. This is yet another reason why overconsumption must be tackled.¹¹

The role of social media in overconsumption

¹⁰ "Population Growth, Resource Consumption, and The Environment | Population Summit of the World's Scientific Academies | The National Academies Press." The National Academies Press, www.nap.edu/read/9148/chapter/5.

¹¹ "UNICEF: 500 Children Die Every Day from Lack of Safe Water, Sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa." UNICEF | Children's Rights & Emergency Relief Organization, 15 Dec. 2015, www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_86521.html.

In the era we live today, technological advances are being made every day. Almost everyone has a mobile phone and access to social media. Therefore, it is very easy for every consumer to be influenced by the mass media. The life that is being portrayed in social media seems ideal; however, it is not. Many buyers, in order to achieve such a “perfect” lifestyle tend to buy anything that the so called “influencers” promote. Citizens with little to no education for example, are people that can be easily influenced, and are prone to consuming anything due to exhaustive advertisement on modern media. Nonetheless, once they purchase what they think will completely alter and better their life they quickly realize that it’s most likely useless to them and they throw it away. As mentioned before, throwing items away and not recycling them creates waste, which destroys the natural environment. Taking all that into consideration, consumers must not give into impulsive decisions and purchases only because they have been promoted by someone with influence on the internet.



Overconsumption during the pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic people have had the need to attach to the outer world and take part in an activity, which was casually done before quarantine. In order to fulfill that need, many turned to online shopping. Hoping to fill the void that was created during the pandemic, citizens of all ages started to spend enormous amounts of money on this form of entertainment. This, of course, increased consumption since everyone was indeed shopping excessively and limitlessly. However, another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that the transportations of the items purchased were limited. Therefore, CO2 emissions were limited, the return of wildlife and flora blooming increased, and the pollution surprisingly declined, obviously and undoubtedly limiting the ecological footprint.

Statistic that shows weight changes, specifically weight gain, throughout quarantine.

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MAJOR COUNTRIES AND YORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Forum for the Future

¹² "Associations Between Changes in Health Behaviours and Body Weight During the COVID-19 Quarantine in Lithuania: The Lithuanian COVIDiet Study." MDPI, 13 Oct. 2020, www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/12/10/3119/htm.

One organization whose target is limiting overconsumption is Forum for the Future. The Protein Challenge 2040 is a challenge created by the abovementioned organization which aims to provide access to healthy, sustainable, affordable sources of protein to the population without depleting the earth's natural resources. The Forum for the Future hopes to create a sustainable protein system which does not harm the finite resources or the planet.

People's Republic of China

China has always been one of the most economically strong nations in the whole world. In order to achieve that, the earth's natural resources have been severely exploited. The Chinese citizens tend to overconsume more than any citizens do. Many of them consume limitless and only after the purchase has been made, realize that the products are unnecessary, since studies have shown that the same items still have their price tags on them, even after years after the purchase has been made have passed. A report released by Greenpeace on May 17th, in which 1,800 residents of 14 cities across the Chinese mainland from ages between 20 and 45 took part, indicated that over half of them overspent and bought items that they admit they have no use of. The motives behind this overconsumption are various. The most popular among them is the people's need to feel more confident. The ideology that "the more someone possesses, the more popular that makes him" seems to have resonance among consumers in China. As the survey further states people from the age of 35 to 45 have this unhealthy shopping habit of overspending. The average amount of money respondents spent on shopping was priced at about 1,000 RMB per month nationwide, and the average amount of time consumers spent shopping was two hours per day. This survey thoroughly explains the problem of overconsumption in such an economically developed country, like China.

Russian Federation

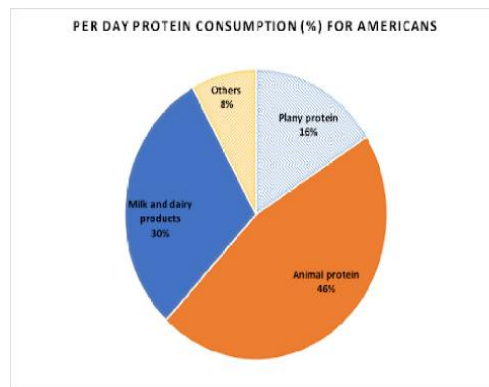
Russia is one of the many countries faced with the issue of overconsumption as well. A study by Deloitte published in 2019 indicated that 30 percent of the Russian citizens describe themselves as shopping enthusiasts, since they claim that they will visit the stores, even if they do not have a specific need for a particular product or service. On the other hand, only 2 percent of the respondents are not in favor of going to the stores if they are not in need of something specific. Taking these percentages into consideration, it is understandable that overconsumption also exists in the Russian Federation (Russia). However, its citizens make efforts to solve this problem. For instance, since an organized recycling system does not exist in Russia, residents carry their recyclables to collection points, which have been set up by volunteers of Greenpeace Russia.

United Kingdom (UK)

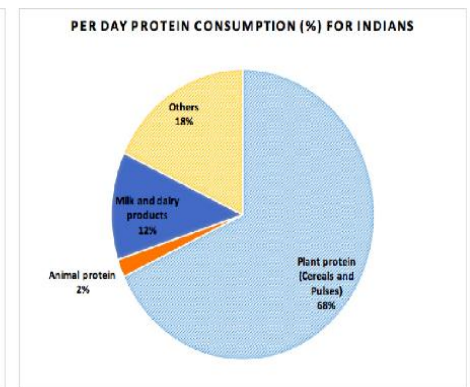
Overconsumption is a phenomenon, that can be also spotted in Britain. One of the biggest sectors, in which British citizens tend to overconsume is housing. Home ownership has steadily increased during the past few decades, especially after World War II. According to statistics published by National Statistics 2002 the owner occupation rates have risen, taking into consideration, that the percent, as far as housing is concerned, was 47 in 1971, whereas the percent in 2001 was 68. Apart from that, a big percent of Britain citizens nowadays has the need to overconsume when they design their bathrooms. They do not see the bathroom for its use, instead they decorate it excessively, only to show off. This is a great example of overconsumption in Britain, where citizens make unnecessary purchases.

United States of America (USA)

It is evident that the United States of America (USA) is a highly developed nation, possessing one of the strongest international economies. The current population of the United States of America is about 332,817,941¹³. According to the "Story of Stuff Project Fact" sheet, USA consumes almost 5 percent of our planet's resources and 24 percent of the world's energy¹⁴, in order to feed and sustain its population. The American population consumes almost 200 billion calories more than the average, which is almost enough to feed another 80 million citizens. Apart from that, Americans tend to waste huge proportions of food, almost 200,000 tons of edible food daily¹⁵.



Source: National Sample Survey, 2011-12, Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia



Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4555161/>

EARTH.ORG

Two graphs compare the average consumption of protein of an American and Indian citizen.

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TIMELINE OF EVENTS

¹³ "United States Population (2020)." Worldometer - Real Time World Statistics, www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population/.

¹⁴ "Population and Energy Consumption." Washington State University, www.public.wsu.edu/~mreed/380American%20Consumption.htm.

¹⁵ "Overconsumption: the American Diet." Earth.Org - Past | Present | Future, 27 Aug. 2020, www.earth.org/data_visualization/overconsumption-the-american-diet/.

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1669	First product in recorded history that was overconsumed: tobacco, a highly addictive substance
1760 to 1840	During the Industrial Revolution mankind discovered the use of fossil fuels, leading to an energy surplus for human societies
1850	During the 1850s overconsumption was not yet a threat to the planet. On the contrary “pauperism” was popular. Pauperism describes a situation of extreme poverty.
Sept. 24 th , 1896	Black Friday (stock market crash)
1950	The issue of overconsumption is firstly introduced in the United States of America.
During the 1970s	Technological advances were made, creating an immense need for resources, especially energy, leading to overconsumption.
1983	China is officially declared as an overconsuming nation
3-14 th of June, 1992	UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) takes place in Rio de Janeiro

March 31 st , 2010	Resolution 64/236 is adopted by the UN
2011	Wales begins to charge for plastic bags at stores
2013	Northern Ireland begins to charge for plastic bags
2014	Northern Ireland begins to charge for any carrier bags
October 5 th , 2015	England begins to charge for purchases of plastic bags
2015	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is set by the UN
2019	A warning on the climate crisis signed by 11,000 scientists from over 150 nations reported that economic growth is the driving force behind the "excessive extraction of materials and overexploitation of ecosystems"
2019	The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services was published by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

December 2019	The COVID-19 pandemic strikes, leading to less consumption of the earth's natural resources due to lockdown.
January 31 st , 2020	The WHO (World Health Organization) announces COVID-19 to be a Global Health emergency
March 11 th , 2020	The WHO declares the COVID-19 pandemic
February 8 th , 2021	European Parliament calls for extended use of binding targets

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In 2015, 195 nations complied with the UN and set out 17 goals that are a blueprint to achieving a better and more sustainable future for all, while addressing the significant challenges the world and the people in it face on a daily basis. The 17 goals that have been set are : Eliminate Poverty, Erase Hunger, Establish Good Health and Well-Being, Provide Quality Education, Enforce Gender Equality, Improve Clean Water and Sanitation, Grow Affordable and Clean Energy, Create Decent Work Conditions and Economic Growth Increase Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Reduce Inequality Mobilize Sustainable Cities and Communities, Influence Responsible Consumption and Production, Organize Climate Action Develop Life Below Water, Advance Life On Land Guarantee Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions Build Partnerships for the Goals. As it is evident not all 17 goals are directly related to the issue of overconsumption, but they all aim to provide and create a more sustainable environment, not only for this generations, but for the future ones as well.

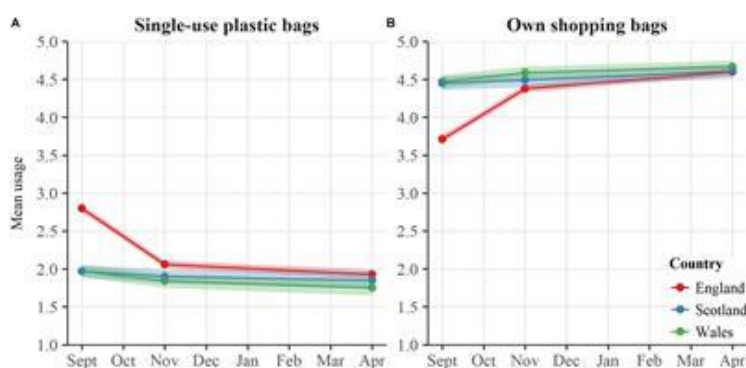
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a specialized agency, that primarily aims to eradicate world hunger. Apart from that, it also acts against other worldwide

issues, such as overconsumption. It is notable that this organization, together with the World Water Council, calls for government policies and investment by both private and public sectors to ensure the sustainable production of crops, livestock, and fish, in ways that also protect water resources. FAO promotes a sustainable lifestyle which is one way to eradicate overconsumption.

The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) aims to report regular assessments and reports as far as the biodiversity and ecosystem services are concerned. The main goal of this assessment is to assess the status and trends in regard to biodiversity and ecosystem services and the impact of biodiversity and ecosystem services on human well-being. It was established in accordance with a resolution by the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly¹⁶, which urged the United Nations Environment Program to implement its provisions.



Resolution 64/236¹⁷

The resolution 64/236 adopted by the UN on the 31st of March 2010 suggests the Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the

Statement of principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests was created by the United Nations in order to protect the environment from human activities and has been adopted by more than 178 governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992¹⁹. Agenda 21 aims to promote sustainable development in as many countries as

Statistic about the use of plastic bags since the enforcement of taxes.

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¹⁶ "A/RES/65/162 - E - A/RES/65/162 -Desktop." ESubscription to United Nations Documents, www.undocs.org/en/A/RES/65/162.

¹⁷ "A/RES/64/236 - E - A/RES/64/236 -Desktop." ESubscription to United Nations Documents, www.undocs.org/en/A/RES/64/236.

¹⁸ "The English Plastic Bag Charge Changed Behavior and Increased Support for Other Charges to Reduce Plastic Waste." Frontiers, www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00266/full.

¹⁹ "Agenda 21." Home .. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/outcomedocuments/agenda21.

possible. In order for sustainable development to be achieved, overconsumption must be tackled, therefore is agenda 21 also a means to end overconsumption.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Many attempts have been made in the past to tackle the issue of overconsumption. The most recent one was made on February 8th, 2021, when the European Parliament called for the EU to set binding targets, to use recycled content in products and consume fewer raw materials. The European Union's executive Commission is drafting laws which will consist of the usage of fewer resources and switching from raw materials to more reused and recycled ones. Apart from this, many countries have rolled out plastic bag charges in an effort to eradicate overconsumption. This idea was introduced first in Wales in 2011, Northern Ireland followed in 2013, Scotland then introduced the charge for all carrier bags in 2014, and England rolled out its plastic bag charge on October 5th, 2015. Greece has also implemented this tax since 2020. It is evident that this effort has had results. Citizens who were not willing to pay the agreed price of the bags chose to bring their own bags instead of buying a plastic one. The bags were then reused and not thrown away.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Use of reusable products

The more products we use, the more waste we create. Waste, consequently, leads to the pollution of the environment and the destruction of ecosystems. That is why consumers have to limit overconsumption and start searching for alternatives. One alternative is the use of reusable products. Instead of buying a drink in a disposable container a reusable container can be used. Reusable materials are helping eliminate overconsumption, since they can be used more than one time in comparison to disposable cups, which can be used only once. This means that instead of throwing away a cup, for example, people who have purchased reusable cups can re-fill them and not only consume less waste, but also create less. Apart from cups many things can also be reused. An example for such are clothes. Instead of throwing away old clothes, people should donate them or sell them to a second-hand store, so that other people can wear them as well.

Green lifestyle

Another factor that plays a major role in the phenomenon of overconsumption is the way we live. We often do not consider the consequences that our actions have and proceed to make decisions which will have a negative impact on our surroundings. For example, when we could not use the car and walk instead, we decide to take the car only because it is more convenient. What we do not consider at that time is that we have the opportunity to not harm the

environment, but we decide to take the car either way. Therefore, one other solution that can help tackle the issue of overconsumption is for citizens of the community to start having a greener lifestyle. Using recycled paper, traveling green, and recycling are some good ways to help the society combat the problem of overconsumption without drastically changing lifestyle. The creation of new greener habits will help the planet, nature and society and this is the reason why they need to be adapted by all humans.

Reduction of plastic

Plastic is a material that has been causing damage and harming the environment for ages. In cases, where plastic is not recycled and most likely ends up in the ocean, it becomes a threat for many animals underwater. Animals are being killed and the ecosystem is, therefore, destroyed. It is evident that almost all plastics are made from chemicals that come from the production of planet-warming fuels. Therefore, the demanding need of plastic prolongs our needs for the abovementioned fuels. The more the society's demand for these fuels grows, the more serious the issue of overconsumption becomes. One solution is for citizens to reduce their use of plastic, by refraining from buying plastic bags for groceries for example.

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