

## So you think you're green?

I attended the meeting: *So you think you're green*<sup>1</sup>, organised by the Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology on 16 May. So here are a few conclusions - somewhat personal, but certainly based on the 'takeaways' at the end of the meeting.

But first a bit of context. Measured in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents, Luxembourg produces around 13 tonnes per capita a year. This is one of the highest levels in the world. It is partly (though only partly) explained by the amount of fuel bought by drivers passing through the country each day and also by the number of non-residents who work in Luxembourg but live over the border. To achieve a sustainable level of CO<sub>2</sub> across the global population the average production should be as little as 2-3 tonnes a year. So we have a long way to go.

In deciding how we can personally reduce our 'footprint', it is important to distinguish between actions that would make a significant difference (10% or so) and those that wouldn't – even though they may seem attractive.

So, actions that can make a significant distance (particularly concerning the impact on climate change):

- **Transport:** obviously walking or cycling is best of all; by all means use an electric bike as the amount of energy they consume is negligible. After that buses, trains and other forms of public transport are much more efficient than driving in a private car. Worst of all of course is flying. Somewhat surprisingly there is, as yet, no great benefit in driving an electric car, though that should improve as more power is generated from sustainable sources.
- **Heating:** turn down your central heating thermostat by a degree or two and be prepared to wear a pullover in the house. (Not mentioned in the meeting, but some of us might also be able to switch our heating from oil to gas – something which we personally have not done!!)
- **Food:** there is no need to become a vegetarian. But cutting out beef has a very much bigger positive impact than cutting out other forms of meat or dairy or eggs.
- **Material goods:** make your clothes last longer and buy less. In general, choose to repair rather than replace possessions. (Often repairing will not be cheaper, but will be more labour intensive and so helps to create and sustain employment.)
- **Finally,** and perhaps obviously, recycle as much as possible.

Some actions which you may want to take but which have a much smaller environmental impact:

- Eating organic foods has a slight and somewhat variable impact from a climate change perspective, though there may well be other reasons to do so, such as helping to maintain biodiversity.
- Removing food packaging does not make a big difference and indeed some foods (raspberries were mentioned) have to be carefully packaged.

Overall there were about 100 people at the meeting, most of them much younger than me. The presentations were very professional and the whole meeting was conducted entirely in English.

I imagine that for many of us we are trapped in a style of life that cannot easily be changed. But perhaps we have to find a way of taking one step at a time.....

Steve McCarthy, 30 May 2019

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<sup>1</sup> [http://neimenster.calendar.lu/ccrn\\_newsletter.asp?ccrn=139502&m=5&y=2019&typus=0&flex=0](http://neimenster.calendar.lu/ccrn_newsletter.asp?ccrn=139502&m=5&y=2019&typus=0&flex=0)