



COMINO FOUNDATION

Press Article

How broadening your mind can help save the planet

by Anthony Darbyshire

As an abundantly justified concern for the environment shifts more and more into the spotlight for politicians it also has a profound influence on our own thoughts and feelings about the world we live in. Increasingly we all want to do what we can to help the environment.

It's heartening, and also indicative of how much the environment means to us, that we are all so willing nowadays to 'do our bit' in the battle to stop climate change and prevent global warming from damaging our environment beyond repair. Even over the past decade, we have all started doing things we might never - even quite recently - have thought of doing.

After all, don't most of us take part very willingly in recycling schemes run by our local councils? Aren't we all becoming more and more amenable to the idea of having solar panels in our houses and don't we all take alternative power sources much more seriously now than we did in the past? They were once seen as something a bit cranky but today I think we see them as a key element of our salvation from environmental problems.

What else can we do? Think about changing to hybrid, or even hydrogen-powered, cars? This may be something on the agenda in the future, but new technologies to replace the internal combustion engine have not yet 'arrived', at least not in the UK.

So what can we do apart from this? A few months ago, The Comino Foundation - an educational foundation with a focus on environmental issues - commissioned some research into the relationship between spending on consumer goods and saving the environment. We wanted to look at the pretty major, bold issue of whether it would be possible usefully to contribute to the environment if people could be encouraged to think harder about, and then change, their spending behaviour.

The report was commissioned by cebr, the influential Centre for Economics and Business Research.

The report provided solid and reliable evidence that greenhouse gas emissions could be six percent lower by 2015 than they would otherwise be if consumers were to reduce their purchase of manufactured goods by just ten percent. A six percent saving would be equivalent to half the emissions from cars on the UK roads.

The implications of this report are startling. The logical consequences are that consumers can significantly help the planet by focusing more of their spending on cultural and social pursuits and on other activities not centred around material possessions.

Why? Basically, because manufacturing and distributing consumer goods to your house is a carbon-intensive activity and therefore liberates more carbon into the atmosphere than enjoying cultural and social pursuits. Clearly, even people reluctant to install solar panels and roof windmills and who are resistant to other proactive climate-friendly measures can still contribute to reducing global warming by enriching their lifestyle rather than accumulating more material possessions.

What does this mean at a practical level? Simply that you're doing more to help the environment if you enjoy yourself with social and community activities instead of buying more new manufactured goods.

After all, isn't it sheer common sense that if you can reduce your consumption of manufactured goods and increase your participation in cultural and social events that are pretty carbon-neutral, you're inevitably going to be helping to re-allocate resources in favour of those cultural and social pursuits.

Making this kind of lifestyle change is actually straightforward and represents a way for everyone to help the economy. After all, until quite recently most people wouldn't have bothered to recycle recyclable domestic waste such as paper, empty metal cans, plastic bottles and so on, but nowadays most communities have highly successful programmes for such recycling.

No-one's suggesting that you deny yourself the manufactured goods you *need*, but there *is* a powerful environmental case for thinking twice about buying things you don't really need.

The truth is that the well-being of the environment is not so much dependent on high-level summit meetings between governments and government agencies, but rather on the contributions individuals make.

The message is clear: you really can contribute to the well-being of the environment by switching some part of your enjoyment of life from consuming manufactured goods to devoting more of your time to social and cultural enjoyment.

Whilst it might be patronising to list specific ideas for switching to that kind of enjoyment - after all, we already know what social and cultural activities interest us - I think there is value in reminding ourselves of the range of social and cultural activities that can be great fun.

- go more often to the cinema, the theatre or concerts
- take up a sport or join a fitness club
- out-do the experts on the gardening programmes. Home-grown vegetables really are the most delicious
- have fun with local societies, community groups or charities
- acquire new skills. How about learning Chinese, the violin, or taking up chess?
- re-visit hobbies that interested us when we were young
- read more books, or even try writing one
- surf the internet more to develop our interests
- enjoy delving into local history
- do more of any of the above with our families.

After all, ultimately the world is where we all live, and if we can make ultimately highly pleasurable changes in our lifestyle to improve the environment we all share, how can that be anything other than a tremendous change for the better in every respect?

*The report, '**Switching lifestyles: global warming without disaster**' was commissioned by the Comino Foundation and carried out by cebr.*

The report can be viewed at or downloaded from
http://www.cominofoundation.org.uk/cebr_report.pdf

*Hard copies (price £15) are available from the Comino Environment Fellow:
Anthony Darbyshire,*

Firs Farmhouse, Bilby, Retford, Nottinghamshire DN22 8JB

Tel: 01777 711141

Email: anthony.darbyshire@cominofoundation.org.uk

For further information please contact:

James Essinger

Principal, Da Vinci Public Relations

43 Nunnery Fields, Canterbury CT1 3JT

Tel: 01227 472874 Fax: 01227 472800 Mobile: 07831 259889

Email: jamesessinger@davincipr.com