Unit 4

Saving People



https://gizmodo.com/paris-as-a-green-and-sustainable-future-city-is-even-mo-1680372218

Modern technology owes ecology an apology.
Alan M. Eddison

SECTION 1: WARM-UP

1. Look at the statistics below and discuss the questions.

Did you know that...?

- ⇀ Globally, the number of international air passengers increased from **88 million** in 1972 to **760 million** in 2006 (ICAO 2007) up to **4.1 billion** in 2017 (IATA 2017)
- ⇀ An average EU household owns between **20** and **30** technological **devices** (IEA 2009)
- ⇀ In big cities the average **road speed** for cars has levelled off at around **15 km/h** due to congestion (Radanne 2011)
- ⇀ Europeans spend between **60** and **90%** of their lives **indoors** – be it at home or in other public or private indoor environments such as schools, cafes and restaurants (IAIAQ 2011)
- ⇀ **Obesity** has more than doubled globally since 1980 (WHO 2011)

1. What are the causes and consequences of these trends? What are the solutions?
2. What do you think "**degrowth**" means?
3. What may be the goals of the *degrowth movement*?

2. Watch the video episode (1) and write down the speaker's message.

3. **Watch the video episode (2) and write down the problems and solutions suggested by the speaker. Then discuss the given statements.**

Problem	Solution

1. Both production and consumption need to be reduced to mitigate the impact on the environment.
2. The pleasure of leisure should replace the obsession with work, social life should take precedence over endless consumerism.
3. Ethical consumption leads to less materialistic but more fulfilling lifestyles, as it frees up energy, time, and finances.
4. Economic growth is not compatible with the ideas of degrowth.
5. Sustainable lifestyle contributes significantly to minimizing the overall damage to the environment.

4. **You are going to read an article entitled** *The Truth about the Environment.* **What do you think the article is about? Write down your ideas in keywords below.**

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SECTION 2: READING

5. Read the article *The Truth about the Environment* **and answer the questions**.

key words

The Truth about the Environment

§1 For many environmental activist groups, the world seems to be **deteriorating**. They have developed a hit-list of our main fears: that natural resources will soon be **depleted**; that the population is ever growing, leaving less and less to eat; that species are becoming extinct in vast numbers, and that the planet's air and water are becoming ever more polluted. But a quick look at the facts shows a different picture.

§2 First, energy and other natural resources have become more **abundant**, not less so, since the book 'The limits to Growth' was published in 1972 by a group of academics. Second, more food is now produced per head of the world's population than at any time in history. Fewer people are starving. Third, although species are indeed becoming extinct, only about 0.7% of them are expected to disappear in the next 50 years, not 25-50%, as has so often been predicted. And finally, most forms of environmental pollution either appear to have been exaggerated, or are **transient** - associated with the early phases of industrialization and therefore best **remedied** not by restricting economic growth, but by accelerating it. One form of pollution - the release of greenhouse gases that causes global warming - does appear to be a phenomenon that is going to extend well into our future, but its total impact is unlikely to pose a devastating problem. A bigger problem may well turn out to be an inappropriate response to it.

§3 Yet opinion polls suggest that many people nurture the belief that environmental standards are declining and four factors seem to cause this **disjunction** between perception and reality. One is the **lopsidedness** built into scientific research. Scientific funding goes mainly to areas with many problems. That may be wise policy but it will also create an impression that many more potential problems exist than is the case.

§4 Secondly, environmental groups need to be noticed by the mass media. They also need to keep the money rolling in. Understandably, perhaps, they sometimes **overstate** their arguments. In 1997, for example, the World Wilde Fund for Nature issued a press release entitled: 'Two thirds of the world's forests lost forever'.

The truth turns out to be nearer 20%.

§5 Though these groups are run overwhelmingly by selfless folk, they nevertheless share many of the characteristics of other lobby groups. That would matter less if people applied the same degree of scepticism to environmental lobbying as they do to lobby groups in other fields. A trade organisation arguing for, say, weaker pollution control is instantly seen as self-interested. Yet a green organisation opposing such a weakening is seen as **altruistic**, even if an **impartial** view of the controls in question might suggest they are doing more harm than good.

§6 A third source of confusion is the attitude of the media. People are clearly more curious about bad news than good. Newspapers and broadcasters are there to **cater to** the public wants. That, however, can lead to significant **distortions** of perception. An example was America's encounter with EI Nino in 1997 and 1998. This climatic phenomenon was accused of wrecking tourism, causing allergies, melting the ski-slopes, and causing 22 deaths. However, according to an article in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, the damage it did was estimated at US$4 bn but the benefits amounted to some US$19 bn. These came from higher winter temperatures (which saved an estimated 850 lives, reduced heating costs and **diminished** spring floods caused by meltwaters).

§7 The fourth factor is poor individual perception. People worry that the endless rise in the amount of stuff everyone throws away will cause the world to run out of places to **dispose of** waste. Yet, even if America's trash output continues to rise as it has done in the past, and even if the American population doubles by 2100, all the rubbish America produces through the entire 21st century will still take up only one-12,000th of the area of the entire United States.

§9 So what of global warming? As we know, carbon dioxide emissions are causing the planet to warm. The best estimates are that the temperatures will rise by 2-3°C in this century, causing considerable problems, at a total cost of US$5,000 bn.

§10 Despite the intuition that something **drastic** needs to be done about such a costly problem, economic analyses clearly show it will be far more expensive to cut CO_2 emissions radically than to pay the costs of adaptation to the increased temperatures. A model by one of the main authors of the United Nations Climate Change Panel shows how an expected temperature increase of 2.1°C in 2100 would only be diminished to an increase of 1.9°C. Or to put it another way, the temperature increase that the planet would have

experienced in 2094 would be postponed to 2100.

§11 So this does not prevent global warming, but merely buys the world six years. Yet the cost of reducing carbon dioxide emissions, for the United States alone, will be higher than the cost of solving the world's single, most pressing health problem: providing universal access to clean drinking water and sanitation. Such measures would avoid 2 mln deaths every year, and prevent half a billion people from becoming seriously ill.

§12 It is crucial that we look at the facts if we want to make the best possible decisions for the future. It may be costly to be overly optimistic - but more costly still to be too pessimistic.

adapted from https://mini-ielts.com/202/reading/the-truth-about-the-environment

1. Make sure you know the meaning of the following expressions from the text:
   - **lopsidedness**
   - **a disjunction**
   - **lobby groups**
   - **transient**
2. What distorts people's perception of environmental problems?
3. What is the relationship between pollution and economic growth, as suggested by the author? Do you agree?
4. What does the author think of environmentalists? Do you share his opinion?
5. What is the author's analysis of the global warming threat? Do you find it convincing?

6. Write a short paragraph, using the beginning given.

Environmental agenda today …