

THE ART OF MAKING EXCUSES

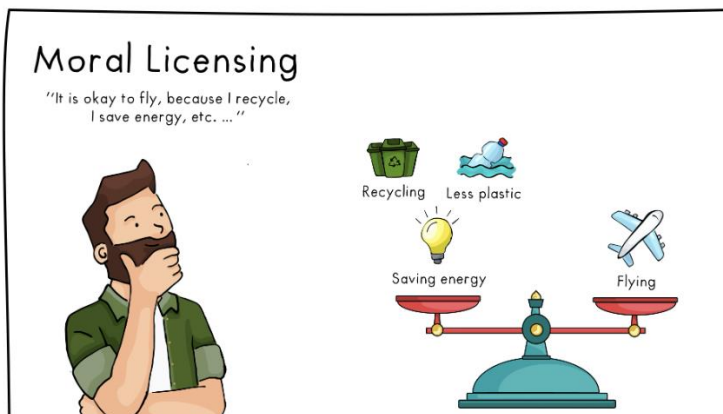
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEALING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Most of us care about the climate and environment, but our behaviour does not always align with these sentiments. For example, we fly abroad, enjoy South-American beef or have fancy coffee from aluminum capsules. We would like to act differently, but it often just does not work out. Thinking and acting obviously are two different things. In addition, politicians, businesses and individuals frequently shift the blame to each other and bring forward all kind of excuses for why they cannot act sustainably.

WHAT ARE THE UNDERLYING PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF THESE BEHAVIORS?

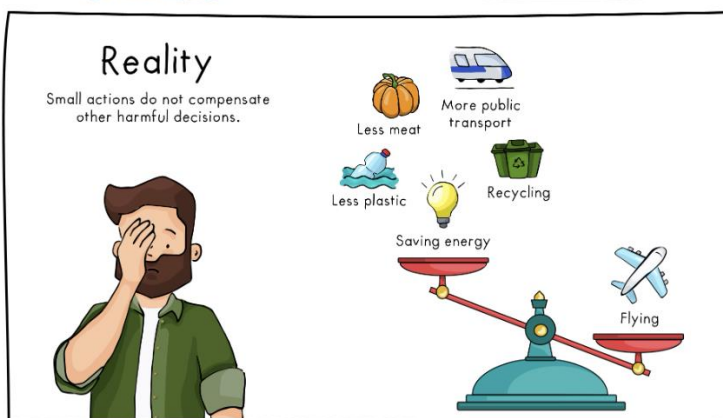
AND WHAT CAN PSYCHOLOGY CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS?

Researchers have recorded a basic understanding of the overall climate crisis among the public.



However, specific details pertaining to climate literacy are not common knowledge. Small efforts, like Austrian municipalities planting trees in their main square, are used to give citizens the impression of being climate-friendly.

Within the EU Horizon 2020 Excite project, psychologist and published author Thomas Brüdermann led an insightful workshop on the various behavioural patterns when dealing with the climate crisis. The basis for this workshop is his book 'The Art of Making Excuses', currently only available in German, which grants a fresh perspective on how individuals make decisions in the face of the climate crisis.¹



Common misconceptions about climate-influencing aspects, such as the ozone layer and water vapour, overshadow the comprehension of the climate crisis. In

Moral licensing of climate-unfriendly decisions - A Hoeben & T Brüdermann - klimapsychologie.com - CC-BY-ND.

¹ *Die Kunst der Ausrede. Warum wir uns lieber selbst täuschen, statt klimafreundlich zu leben.* ISBN 9783962389505

English translation: *The Art of Making Excuses. Why we would rather deceive ourselves than live in a climate-friendly way*

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order to tackle this limited climate literacy, Thomas Brudermann wrote ‘The Art of Making Excuses’, using humorous and psychological elements to facilitate the discussion about the climate crisis.

Multi-national studies analysing answers to questionnaires concerning climate-influencing behaviour reveal an alarming pattern. The majority of participants consider reducing water usage at home and avoiding plastic bags the most important actions to improve their climate impact. Yet, other options, such as avoiding air travel and instead using public transport, which have a greater negative effect on climate, were not chosen as often.

The psychological foundation of the so-called ‘moral licencing’ phenomenon is the balancing of choices and actions. This involves incorporating climate-friendly practices into our everyday life in order to justify climate-unfriendly behaviour. For instance, we believe that if we recycle and perceive ourselves as climate-friendly, we have the right to take long-distance flights. However, these acts do not cancel out the disastrously high CO₂ emissions from planes. Looking at climate-behaviour, ‘moral licencing’ is a widespread coping-mechanism for making excuses.

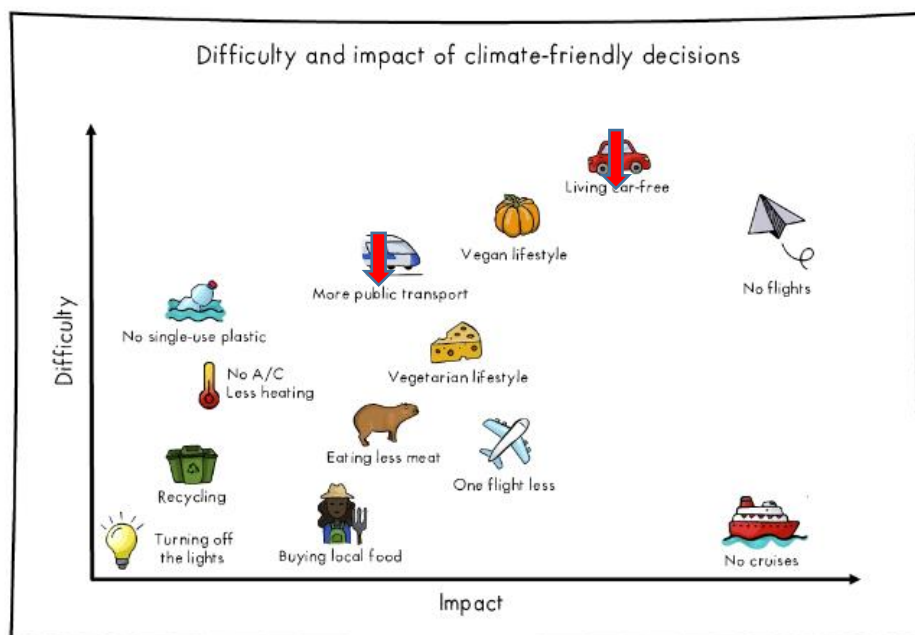
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A combination of our behavioural patterns and our immediate environment is vital in the transition

process. These aspects can be adapted through various measures to promote climate-friendly decision-making processes.

By weaving behavioural changes into daily routines, climate behaviour can be positively influenced by people’s decision-making.

On municipal level, this means to make climate-friendly actions for citizens more easy, or vice versa, to make climate-harmful choices more difficult. One way to achieve this is by creating incentives for



Impact and difficulty of climate-friendly decisions -- T Brudermann & A Hoeben – klimapsychologie.com – CC-BY-ND.

climate-friendly decisions, such as improving public transport to cut down traffic or by reducing car parking spaces, as can be seen in the graph above.