

Do people adopt more environmentally friendly habits in Freiburg?

In our research methods module, a small group of us learning about qualitative methods developed a mini-project to see if people adopted more environmentally friendly habits/behaviours when moving to Freiburg and if so, why. The logic behind this concept was that all three members of our group had adopted more environmentally friendly habits since moving to Freiburg. We thought it would be interesting to see if others had done the same, and if so what was their motivation. While each of us in the group had different motivations for changing our own habits, we thought it would be interesting to explore if the *green city* image would have influenced new Freiburgers to adopt environmentally friendly habits/behaviours.

Another group in our class had developed a similar concept so we decided to have one group focus on German students and another group focus on international students. Our group focused on international students, and our official research question was:

When international students move to Freiburg (as a green city), do they change environmental habits/behaviours? Why and how?

What is an environmental habit?

In order to understand a pro-environmental habit it is essential to understand what a pro-environmental behaviour is.

“Proenvironmental behavior is such behavior which is generally (or according to knowledge of environmental science) judged in the context of the considered society as a protective way of environmental behavior or a tribute to the healthy environment.” -Krajhanzl, 2010

Environmental behaviour is a complex subject and there are numerous studies that have been conducted on what influences and/or constrains environmental behaviours (Best and Kneip 2011; Carrus et al. 2008; Cornelissen et al. 2008; Dahlstrand and Biel 1997; Gregory and Di Leo. 2003; Grob 1995; Grønhøj and Thøgersen 2012; Witmarsh and O’Neill 2010; Tanner 1999). Several examples of environmental behaviours include green-consumerism, the use of public transport, recycling, and reducing water consumption.

A habit is a behaviour that becomes a nearly automatic response, and thus requires little to no thought to conduct. Therefore a pro-environmental habit would be a pro-environmental behaviour that has become practically automatic. Within our study we looked at both habits and behaviours, without distinguishing between the two. The purpose of our mini-project was to be more exploratory. With less than a week to conduct this project it wasn’t feasible to conduct a major literature review on existing theories and studies.

Insights from our Mini-Project

Due to timing constraints with this mini-project we only were able to conduct three semi-structured interviews with international students living in Freiburg. Although we were unable to develop any specific conclusions from this research, it provided us with a rich discussion on living in Freiburg and the ability to gain and in some cases even lose environmental habits/behaviours. The following discussion is not an exhaustive list of our findings (eg. habits, motivations and behaviours), but instead provides a brief insight into our project.

In all of our interviews we discovered that the respondents had all adopted some new pro-environmental

habits when moving to Freiburg. Examples of some of their changes made included biking more, buying more organic/bio-products instead of non-organic alternatives (not just food), and shopping at local farmers markets. There were numerous motivations for the adoption of these behaviours/habits. In some instances the infrastructure in Freiburg encourages more ecologically friendly activities such as biking (eg. bike lanes), and in the participants former cities there may have been limited infrastructure to promote this habit/behaviour. Also, the accessibility of products was another motivation for the adoption of certain habits, as some participants cited that in their previous cities there were limited alternatives and such organic or ecological products were not accessible (eg. organic products including organic cosmetics, or energy providers that only provide electricity from renewable sources). Also, in some of our interviews social influence played a significant role through both discussions and shared activities.

Despite moving to a *green city*, all of our respondents in some way lost some environmental habits when moving to Freiburg. Several examples of this include the existence of a more advanced recycling system in a participants home country, an increased emphasis on bio and local agriculture in a participants home country, and the need for increased energy usage on heating in Freiburg in comparison to the respondents hometown.

The findings of the mini-study showed that the participants adopted new pro-environmental habits/behaviours, and that they also lost the ability to maintain others upon moving to Freiburg. This was interesting to reflect on, since Freiburg *green city* is known as being one of the *greenest* cities in Germany, let alone the world, and the participants all reflected on the limitations to being *green*. These interviews demonstrated that there are many different shades of green, and while Freiburg is a *green city*, there is always the possibility for it to become greener.

What do you think?

Did you adopt any pro-environmental habits when you moved to Freiburg? What motivated you to adopt these habits, and do you think you would be able to keep maintain them in the future? Did you lose the ability to maintain certain pro-environment habits when moving to Freiburg?

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