

Article

Preparedness of Young People for a Sustainable Lifestyle: Awareness and Willingness

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Abstract: This article discusses the relationship between a consumer lifestyle and the environment. The willingness to adapt to a sustainable lifestyle was tested through a questionnaire among students of Mendel University in Brno, who are theoretically well-informed people. Overall, 417 students answered, i.e., 19% of the respondents. The students generally recognised the need to address environmental issues, and 90.6% intended to change their lifestyle in this direction. Among the barriers, they mentioned in particular lack of time, lack of financial resources, lack of specific information and insufficient conditions. Addressing this issue requires close co-operation in education between governmental and non-governmental organisations in both the public and private sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the situation in that it has drawn attention to the response of local companies to the global problem.

Keywords: Brno; consumerism; Czechia; environment; questionnaire; sustainable lifestyle



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1. Introduction

Recent social developments have seen trends that are, at first glance, contradictory. Technological development leads to the transition from a productive to a post-productive society, which can be characterized as a society of consumption. Liberal economic approaches, which have been gaining momentum since the 1990s, are based on quantitative growth. However, this growth is at odds with sustainability. The limits of carefree growth reminded us of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could change people's views towards greater sustainability.

Clearly, a new balance needs to be struck between production and consumption, qualitative and quantitative development, prosperity and sustainability and global and local focus. This search is in the interest of future generations. It can be expected to be led by educated people. Therefore, we asked ourselves how university students perceive the relationship between consumption and sustainability.

1.1. Recognising the Impact of Consumerism on the Environment

Environmental issues continue to be a trending topic both in research and among the general public that is frequently presented in various channels of media and the activities that people encounter daily [1]. Along with this, there is a growing understanding of the contribution of human behaviour towards environmental issues and possible solutions [2]. Sometimes, the approach is named green consumerism [3]. Governments and policymakers are also recognising the potential of encouraging environmentally friendly lifestyles among the general public that could provide economic and social benefits [4]. As the levels of intensive consumerist behaviour continue to rise in developed and developing countries, there is a real concern of the externalised damage and pressure it poses on the environment. This has contributed to a wave of actions from governing bodies [5], applied researchers [6], social movement groups and communities [7–9] to emphasise the need for more pro-environmental behaviour and conscious consumerism [10,11] including the idealistic zero-

waste movements [12]. Of course, this environmentally friendly lifestyle is also associated with personal development, see for example the Italian concept of La Bella Figura [13] or different styles of vegetarianism to veganism [14].

In the EU, we see this in the rise of activities and strategies, both from governmental bodies and social movements, to encourage individual involvement and active decision making that will benefit the environment [15,16]. Research also highlights the importance in terms of understanding and promoting pro-environmental behaviours that individual consumers can practise. Although we live in an era where all emphasis and hope are put towards developing new solutions that will reduce both the dependence of our lifestyle on fossil fuels and the unwanted impact of production on the environment [17], individuals with their roles as consumers are part of these solutions as well. From the data available so far, individual consumption in EU households of food, beverages, housing, mobility and tourism poses a significant impact on the environment, both in terms of the intermediate environment and the externalised outputs. However, there is an obvious lack of research on the topic in central European countries such as Czechia that this study aims to partially fulfil, as there is clear value in better understanding the drivers of lifestyle changes as a way to spread better practices.

1.2. Defining Sustainable Lifestyles

Today consumption is widely accepted as a key driver of current sustainability [18]. Although variations exist, the definition of Middlemiss of sustainable lifestyles as “a specific set of practices that the participants are attempting to take on to reduce their impacts on the environment and other people” is what we identified as most suitable in our context. This can also be referred to as ‘low-impact lifestyles’, a term used among the general public through social media and often recognisable especially to the younger generation. As much as they are various and individual, lifestyles are undeniably influenced by the surrounding institutions, infrastructures and environmental conditions as well as the level of education, earnings, age, personal beliefs and priorities. Low-impact lifestyles are also presented as an alternative lifestyle wherein one focuses more consciously on relationships with the environment, ways and extents to which resources are used and personal interactions rather than consumption of material goods and products, which contributes to an overall reduction of the lifestyle impact. According to Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. [19], there are more lifestyles aspiring to sustainability such as health and sustainability, wellness, slow living, smart living, low-carbon lifestyles and consumer behaviour patterns (fair trade, values and lifestyle segmentation), but none of them covers the problem in a complex.

1.3. What It Takes to Form Sustainable Habits—The Role and Responsibility of Young Adults

People are not only consumers of products but also active factors in social systems [20]. In this context, there is obvious interest in the role and scope of contributions that young adults can have, now and in the future, as they exhibit more pro-environmental behaviour, a tendency for open criticism towards industrial and governmental activities and a space for a different type of societal integration. There is a need among young adults to understand how things can be done on a day-to-day basis with sustainable benefits in mind rather than just information on ‘what it is all about’ [21]. The ‘how to’ can be framed as the concept of exploring, forming and adopting new habits that make a difference in the long run and the context of society.

Conscious consumption involves in large part the manner in which we manage our daily life [22], which is mainly based on habits. A habit, defined as a behavioural tendency to repeat responses given a stable supporting context, in terms of consumerism offers the comfort and security of repetition, e.g., buying things one is used to buying, which in turn requires some sort of reward to motivate a change of habit [23]. Human values serve as a guiding principle in the life of a person or other social entity and, as such, have a significant impact on forming pro-environmental behaviours and, in turn, habit forming. When individuals possess certain values that are relevant for pro-environmental

behaviour (e.g., less egoistic and more altruistic and biospheric values), they are more likely to perform various degrees of pro-environmental behaviours depending on their motivation, e.g., whether it is extrinsic (social demands and expectations) or intrinsic (self-determination and personal values and beliefs). These motivational factors are crucial in understanding what can influence and encourage pro-environmental behaviour [24], which is more in line with personal identification. Awareness, as an element of the individual initiative to adopt more sustainable and low-impact habits, is recognised as a positive sign of pro-environmental change and is being asked of governments and industries.

This study aimed to understand the levels of awareness and willingness of students as representatives of young adults in Brno, Czech Republic, as a case study. At the same time, this study might serve the additional purpose of raising a certain level of awareness and encourage both future research and practical action.

1.4. COVID-19 and Sustainability

In 2020 and 2021, the entire world was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Johns Hopkins University, as of 8 June 2021, 3.7 million people died worldwide. The pandemic put a heavy strain on medical systems, which probably led to more casualties because there was no room to treat other diagnoses. The second problem was quarantine measures, which meant for many territories a partial or complete lockdown, associated with the suppression of some activities and the development of others.

Coronavirus disease 19 is an infectious disease and as such comes from the environment. Therefore, in addition to treating the symptoms and later vaccinating, the main measures were aimed at modifying the environment in order to reduce its infectivity. Great emphasis was placed on a significant reduction in the amount of contact between people, which in some cases led to isolation. The environmental consequences of these measures will probably be assessed only after the pandemic has been overcome. It is possible to limit transport over longer distances but also local, which meant an obvious reduction in traffic exhalations, which are among the most serious in developed countries [25]. The increase in hygiene standards could also have had a positive effect. On the other hand, the world is flooded with disposable packaging materials from food and other products delivered to home. Possible environmental psychological consequences will be known after a certain time.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Target Group

The research was carried out among students of Mendel University in the city of Brno. Brno is the second-largest city in the Czech Republic and the historical centre of Moravia. It has 381,000 permanent residents (January 2020). However, the number of people present daily in the city exceeds half a million. A significant part of them (about 70,000) are students of the five public, one state and several private universities. Over the last 30 years, the city's function has changed significantly from an industrial (mainly engineering) centre to a city of higher education, science, research and trade. Although Brno is not one of the most important tourist centres in Czechia, its centre has considerable historical value. However, the architecture from the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), led by Tugendhat Villa, which is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, is more significant.

The main polluter of the environment in Brno in the second half of the last century was industry. Due to the liquidation or relocation of large industrial enterprises, this factor has almost disappeared. Brno is supplied with energy mainly from non-carbon sources (the main producer of energy in the area is the energy complex of the Dukovany–Dalešice nuclear and pumped-storage hydroelectric power plant). Dwellings are mostly heated by gas (in 2011, 0.6% of dwellings were heated with solid fuels only). Wastewater is treated in a modern wastewater treatment plant in Modřice, where part of the waste has begun to be used for the production of biogas for the propulsion of urban transport buses. The Brno dam reservoir, which was polluted with cyanobacteria, has been cleaned at considerable

cost. Solid waste is used to produce heat in an incinerator with an annual capacity of 230,000 tons of waste and an output of 22.7 MW of energy. The solid waste is widely separated; about 21% is recycled. Public transport in the inner city has switched to electric traction (trams, trolleybuses). The main polluter has become individual car transport, the volume of which has increased sharply, both in terms of the number of cars and the intensity of their use. The busiest parts of the city ring have up to 45,000 vehicles per day.

Mendel University is the third-largest and the fourth-oldest university in Brno [26]. It was established in 1919 as an agricultural college. At present, 9200 Czech and about 600 foreign students study at one of five faculties, i.e., AgriSciences, Forestry and Wood Technology, Horticulture (situated in Lednice, South Moravia), Business and Administration, Regional Development and International Studies, and at the Institute of Lifelong Learning. The university uses the University Training Farm at Žabčice and the Forest Training Enterprise 'Masaryk Forest' at Křtiny. The student accommodation facilities provide 3148 beds. The library contains more than 400,000 issues, being the third largest library in the city.

Young adults are an especially valuable target group as they are becoming individually responsible for managing finances and forming their behaviour as consumers. For this purpose as well as the logistical arrangements, currently enrolled students at the Faculty of AgriSciences at Mendel University in Brno, academic year 2019/2020, were taken as a sample group. They were approached with a directly targeted email through the faculty database and asked to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. The questionnaire was administered to 2209 students and was available both in Czech and English, as there are regularly international students at the faculty. The flexibility of completing the questionnaire online, anonymity and individual convenience during the one month the questionnaire was available were the main positive aspects for choosing this type of approach. However, the electronic collection of responses, as expected, resulted in a lower questionnaire return rate. We acknowledge that the results present only a group of people that share a common interest—in this case, environmentalism and eco-friendly behaviour.

2.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions of various types: close-ended questions (dichotomous, multiple-choice, Likert scale, checklist, matrix table) and open-ended questions. In addition to the socio-economic set of questions, the questionnaire was organized into three parts that touched on three different aspects of the topic of interest on both general and personal level. The first part of the questionnaire was focused on understanding the respondents' general view of the current state of the environment. Environmentally significant behaviours, i.e., sustainable habits and low-impact lifestyle, are driven both by personal and contextual factors; thus we deemed important to understand the general level of perception as it can significantly impact personal decision making in regards to low-impact lifestyle. The second part and third part of the questionnaire, Perception and awareness of sustainable low-impact habits and Willingness to adopt more sustainable low-impact habits, were person-oriented. These served to emphasize the role of individual factors that contribute to the perception and awareness of low-impact habits and took into consideration environmental attitudes, personal understanding of low-impact lifestyle and household perception of sustainable habits as well as exploring the personal motivation, values and limitation which inevitably impact the behaviour [27]. In the second part, the scale consisted of five levels for responses that would be able to accurately correspond to the personal view of the respondents. A psychometric addition was also Q.18 (Figure 1) where via a matrix table we direct towards particular manners of expression of sustainable habits and low-impact lifestyle. Indeed, the specific examples helped provide the respondents with a clear view of what the topic in question is and avoid generalizations.

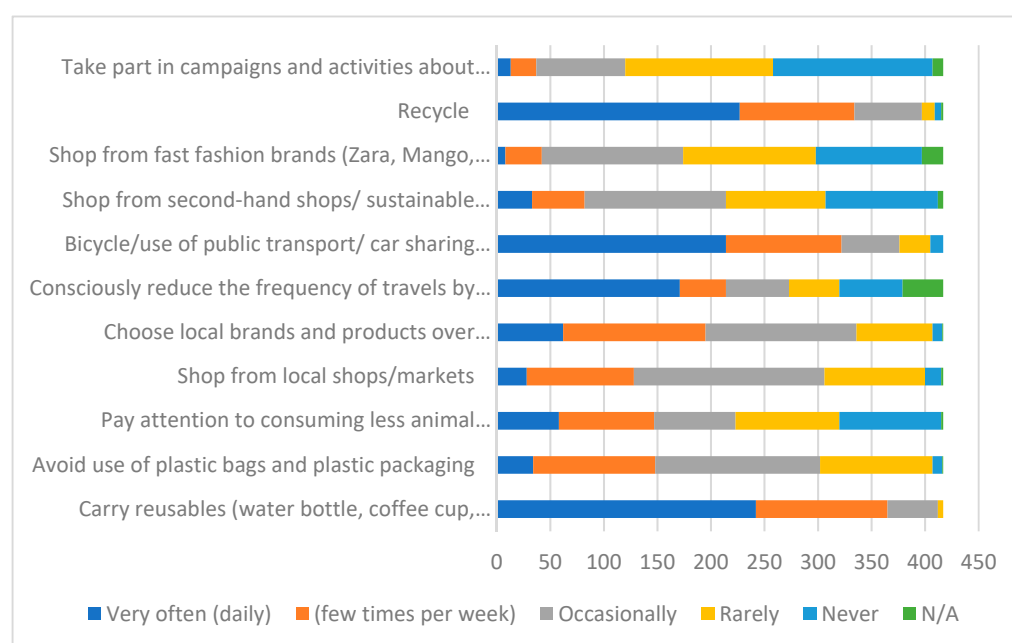


Figure 1. Frequency of practising sustainable habits.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection was conducted using the Czech Survio system. The data were then coded, processed and analysed using SPSS 20.0® for Windows.

3. Results

The results from the Czech and English versions of the questionnaire were accumulated and are presented throughout the paper. The questionnaire received a response rate of 18.9%, a total of 417 recorded full responses.

The socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The gender distribution corresponded to the female–male student distribution at the Faculty of AgriSciences. This response rate additionally confirms similar results from the topic of sustainability, wherein females are considered to be generally more involved in environmental issues than males due to socialisation differences, which could mean that the females were, to a certain extent, initially more motivated to answer the questionnaire. The respondents were aged between 19 and 52 years old, with a mean age of 23.19. The majority of the respondents, 347 (83.2%), were in the age group of 19–25 years. Table 1 also includes data regarding the occupations of the respondents and their sources of income. Although all the respondents were students, since this was the target group as defined before, we asked to see if they had an additional part-time or full-time job. Along with their sources of income, this might have an impact on their financial means and time put towards practising sustainable and low-impact habits.

Table 1. Socioeconomic profile of the respondents.

Characteristics	N	%	M	SD
Gender				
Female	275	65.9		
Male	140	33.6		
N/A	2	0.5		
Age			23.19	4.036
Country				
Czech Republic	374	89.7		
Other	43	10.3		
Occupation				
Student	220	52.8		
Student + Part-time employee	159	38.1		
Student + Full-time employee	38	9.1		
Source of Income				
Employed	88	21.2		
Scholarship	12	3.1		
Home support	114	27.5		
Employed + Scholarship	28	6.7		
Employed + Home support	115	27.7		
Scholarship + Home support	21	5.1		
Employed + Scholarship + Home support	36	8.7		

The results of Part 1 of the questionnaire, which aimed to present the general view of the respondents towards the current state of the environment, are presented in Table 2. The dominant responses are presented in this table, and a full overview of the responses is available in Appendix A.

Table 2. General views of the current state of the environment.

Part 1 Questions	N	%	M	SD	Range
Q.7: What are the (3) biggest threats of the environment most threatening to humanity?					
Climate change	257		0.61	0.487	
Water pollution	240		0.57	0.495	
Deforestation	206		0.49	0.501	
Q.8: What do you think is the current state of the environment?					
3. It is in a bad state, but with a lot of effort from different parties, it can be saved		68.1	2.71	0.494	1–4
Q.9: Who should be responsible for making sure we have a healthy environment?					
Individuals		42.2			
Governments		38.6			
Q.10: Who do you see as the worst polluters that contribute to environmental damages and misbalance?					
Industries		66.4			
Q.11: Given your current view on the state of the environment, how do you see your future?					
Challenging		41.2			
Uncertain		38.8			

Question 7, i.e., ‘What are the (3) biggest threats of the environment most threatening to humanity?’, offered the respondents a choice between 12 issues that are generally considered to be most impactful on the environment and humanity. Due to the educational background of the respondents, it was expected that they have a certain understanding of each issue, and therefore definitions were not provided. As presented in Table 2, the three threats for the environment that were seen as the most important ones among the respondents were climate change, water pollution and deforestation. Figure 2 presents a full overview of the responses for Question 7.

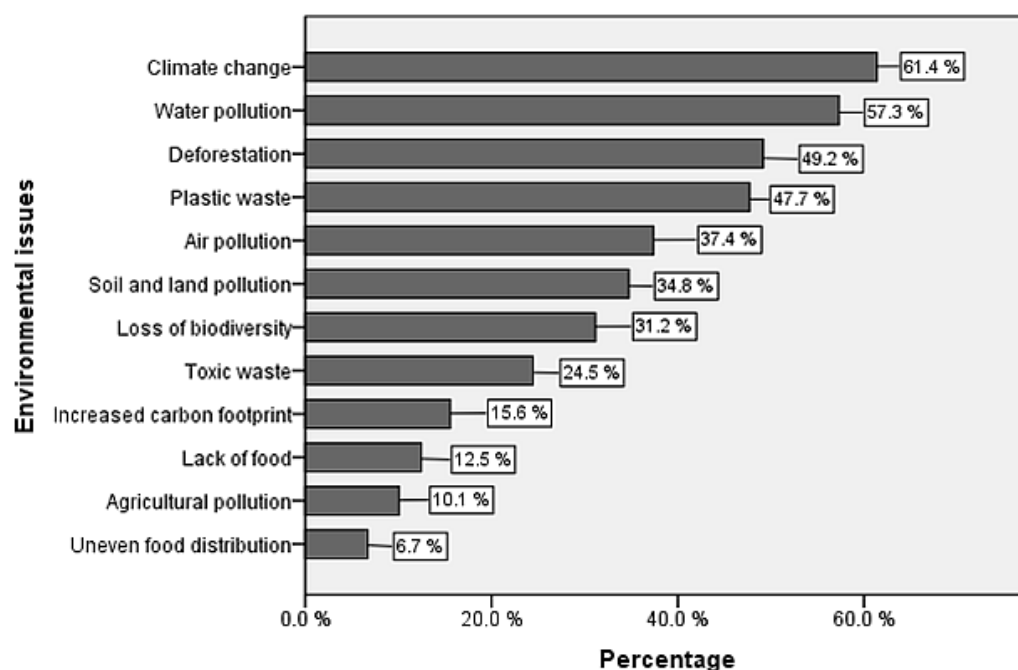


Figure 2. Response frequency for the importance of each environmental issue.

The responses to Part 2 of the questionnaire, focusing on understanding the perception and awareness of the respondents regarding sustainable low-impact habits, are presented in Table 3. Although we assumed that the terms ‘sustainable habits’ and ‘low-impact lifestyle’ were familiar enough, a definition was provided for the respondents to have a clear mutual understanding. Sustainable habits and a low-impact lifestyle were defined in this questionnaire as follows:

Sustainable habits and low-impact lifestyle refer to conscious efforts to reduce the individual environmental impact and the use of resources. This is usually done through daily habits and lifestyle choices that aim to be supportive of the environment and the local community, from an ecological, economical and social aspect.

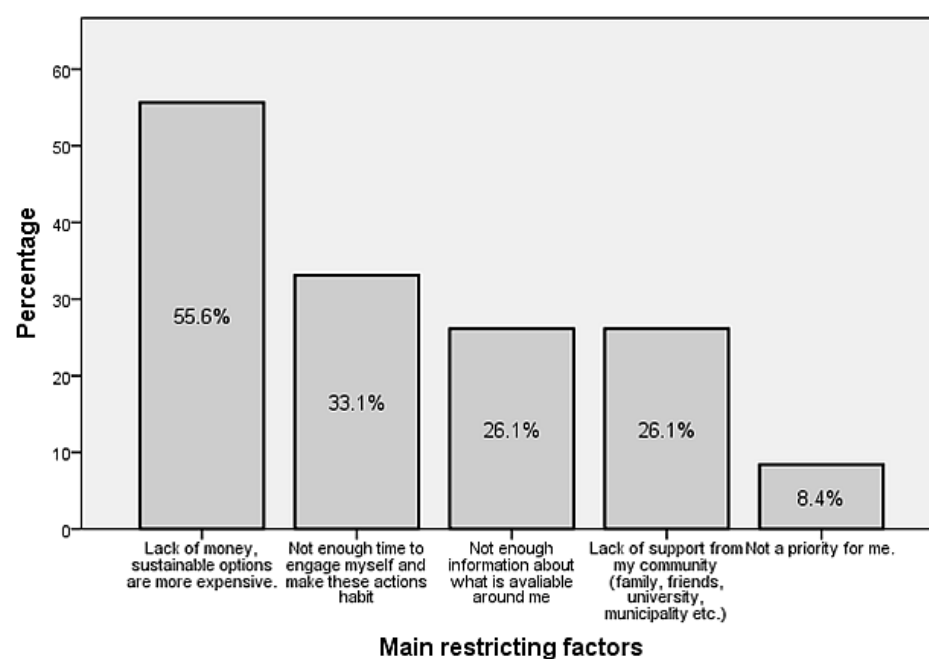
Again, the dominant responses are presented here, and a full overview is available in Appendix A.

In Question 18, i.e., ‘Which of the following activities do you practise and how often?’, the respondents were offered a set of 11 habits that are commonly regarded as more sustainable and aim to lower the individual impact on the environment. For each habit, the respondents were asked to choose how often they practise these habits. The results are presented in Figure 1.

Part 3 of the questionnaire focused on the willingness of the respondents to adopt more sustainable low-impact habits. The majority of them, 378 (90.6%), declared that they were willing to adopt more sustainable lifestyles, while only 39 (9.4%) declared they were not willing to do so. Regarding the main restrictions that inhibited them to have more sustainable, low-impact habits, they were offered a choice of five reasons and asked to select the two that most applied to their circumstances. The results are presented in Figure 3.

Table 3. Perception and awareness of sustainable low-impact habits.

Part 2 Questions	%	Min–Max	M	SD
Q.12: According to you, how big is the impact individuals have on the environment with their habits and lifestyle?		1–4	1.52	0.654
Quite big	54.7			
Relatively big	40.3			
Q.13: How familiar are you with the concept of sustainable habits and low-impact lifestyle?		1–5	2.52	1.031
Relatively familiar	42			
Moderately familiar	23.7			
Q.14: Growing up, how prioritised were sustainable habits in your household?		1–5	2.64	0.948
Relatively prioritised	40.3			
Moderately prioritised	29.3			
Q.15: Do you consider yourself as someone who is environmentally conscious and aware?		1–4	2.01	0.572
Yes, I am aware but not as active as I could be on these issues.	72.4			
Q.16: Do you feel that everyday habits of consumption have an impact on the environment over time?		1–5	1.64	0.915
Yes, I feel that they have a very big impact, and I try to be more mindful about them.	59.7			
Q.17: Do you feel that your community (family, friends, local government, university, shops and businesses you regularly use) support and offer you environmentally friendly choices?		1–5	2.41	0.898
I feel there is some level of support, and I try to use it as much as possible.	56.6			

**Figure 3.** Main restricting factors for forming sustainable, low-impact lifestyle habits.

4. Discussion

Hojnik, Ruzzier and Manolova [28] made a questionnaire survey concerning green consumerism among 705 Slovenian consumers and found that consumers' environmental commitment and perception about eco-products drive the greenest purchase intention. Similarly, the study of Akhtar et al. [29] found that consumers' environmental ethics, moral obligation and green attitude have a significant influence on consumers' willingness to consume green products, which eventually impacts consumers' actual green consumption. Sharma et al. [30] also stated clear relationships between environmental awareness and purchasing trends. It therefore seems that the key issue of an environmentally responsible lifestyle is to be aware of the importance of the environment for the Earth and for the personal lives of its inhabitants.

4.1. The Current Level of Awareness

As presented in Figure 2, the respondents saw climate change, water pollution and deforestation as the main environmental issues. The target group is continuously exposed to information about environmental topics, and thus we can presume that they uphold a certain level of knowledge, as is the case in other countries in the region, e.g., Hungary, as presented by Zsóka et al. [31]. The flow of information from the media is largely focused on climate change as a keyword; thus it is understandable that 61.4% of our respondents identified it and were aware of it as the main environmental threat. However, climate change has under its umbrella a wide number of issues, and it is questionable what exactly it refers to. Environmental topics and issues are something the respondents were familiar with as students at the Faculty of AgriScience, which should contribute to better understanding and pro-environmental behaviour and could have had an impact on their pro-environmental attitude.

The majority of the respondents, 68.1%, thought that the environment is in a bad state but that, with a lot of effort from different parties, it can be saved. Although often questioned, consumers do have the power to impact the decision making of businesses and industries and request products and services that do support the pro-environmental lifestyle, and 42.4% of our respondents also recognised this and saw individual people as responsible for making sure we have a healthy environment. It is interesting to note that 66.4% of the respondents identified industries as the worst polluters. However, this difference in answers, i.e., the individuals as the responsible party and the industries as the worst polluters, might allude to the misconception among many that the final users of the products of many industries are the individuals.

The state of the environment is impacted by all the issues offered as responses in Question 7, but in terms of recognising the individual impact as the main topic of the study, plastic waste and increased carbon footprint are issues that can be more directly correlated. There was an overall impression among the respondents that the impact of small daily habits on the environment is of relatively high significance, with 94% of them seeing it as such. To a certain degree, this corresponds with the environmental issues (Figure 2), where plastic waste was regarded as the fourth main issue, identified by 47.96% of the respondents. Plastic waste is something consumers are dealing with daily, and it is currently an active part of the sustainable lifestyle discussion. The perception of plastic waste is as contradictory in Czechia as it is in many other developed countries. Although there are strong recycling programs and a general awareness among the citizens, there is little real action. A study conducted by Miranda and Blanco placed Czechia among the countries with a medium level of environmental awareness in terms of paper recycling. Considering that recycling is a part of a complex system that requires time, space, money and effort, this means that, to a certain extent, there is a type of support to increase the rate of involvement among the citizens. However, expressed willingness has often been shown to be higher than the actual actions that are being taken.

In terms of the increased carbon footprint, which only 15.83% of the respondents saw as an environmental threat, there is the possibility of lack of knowledge and understanding

of the term and concept of the carbon footprint. This poses the need for education and a well-targeted spread of information.

4.2. Adopting New Habits and Understanding Pro-Environmental Behaviour

Of the respondents, 72.42% declared that in terms of sustainable habits, they were aware but not as active as they could be. Adopting new habits is not simple, especially if there is not strong motivation (in this context, in terms of the individual impact on the environment and understanding to it, having the right information) and suitable conditions.

Although pro-environmental behaviour is a characteristic of each individual, it does not belong solely to them, and a supportive environment is also needed and can reinforce them. Individual choices are impacted by social interactions; therefore, social awareness and activism are an important part of the process of adopting new habits [32] as actions towards reducing the negative environmental effects and have an impact on both the individual and societal level. Of our respondents, 56.5% identified their community as providing them with a certain level of support that they try to use as often as possible. This percentage could lead us to seeing the majority of the target group as aware that practising pro-environmental behaviour demands both individual action and external support.

In terms of individual action, we also looked into the habits that the respondents practise and how often they do so. Research shows that it is likely but not necessary that practising one type of pro-environmental behaviour will bring on another and that the extent to which this pro-environmental behaviour goes is largely influenced by personal identity and values. From our data, we can see that a relatively large percentage of the respondents recycled very often and often (cumulatively 80.1%) but that only 35.5% tried to avoid the use of plastic bags and plastic packaging at the same frequency. This could be an indicator of a lack of understanding about the recycling process and how much it benefits the environment and of prioritising redemption (recycling something after it has been used up or used only once) instead of conscious decision making (avoiding the use of plastic that will later be recycled in the first place). At the same time, cumulatively, 87.5% declared that very often and often, they carry a certain type of reusable product with them (water bottle, coffee cup, bag, etc.), which could indicate that they are already willing to do something extra, regardless of whether they are doing it due to personal values or because it is something that is starting to become normalised among the general public.

4.3. Willingness for Change and Main Restrictions

An absolute majority of our respondents, 90.6%, declared they would be willing to implement more sustainable practices if they had more opportunity and support to do so. However, a pro-environmental attitude does not always mean a sustainable low-impact lifestyle, mainly because pro-environmental people often focus on the small benefits their habits and behaviours have, which, in the big picture of things, has very minimal or sometimes even negative impacts.

Therefore, it is valuable to identify the restricting factors individuals face on a daily level and see how they can be addressed. A generally accepted opinion is that a sustainable lifestyle is more expensive, and our data also go in favour of this, as 55.6% of the respondents identified a lack of financial means to be able to afford sustainable options. In Zsóka et al.'s study, university students also stated a lack of money and a lack of the necessary structural conditions for living an environmentally friendly way. Nonetheless, not having enough information is also a reason that can be correlated with identifying a lack of money and time as a restriction for not adopting low-impact habits. More often than not, low-impact lifestyle habits require an upfront investment that saves money and time over time. Menstrual cups, for example, commonly have a higher initial price when compared to other products, but over time, they are shown to be both environmentally and economically preferable [33]. A reliable source of information and support of the community with events wherein this type of information can be exchanged might contribute towards understanding the individual and societal benefits of implementing these types

of habits. The same goes for the importance of choosing local over imported products. A reliable and approachable source of information could contribute towards increased awareness and understanding of the impact in terms of not only environmental issues (e.g., the higher carbon footprint of imported products that are also available from local producers) but also supporting the local economy and being an active member of the community.

Early childhood experience, involvement in and continuous encouragement for more pro-environmental behaviours are also significant in terms of developing and nurturing a sustainable lifestyle [34]. The majority of the respondents (40.3%) declared that sustainable habits were relatively prioritised in the household they grew up in, which corresponds to the 42% of them who declared themselves familiar with the concept of sustainable habits and low-impact lifestyles. Interestingly enough, Boeve-de Pauw and van Petegem showed that contrary to previous studies, children coming from wealthier families have less pro-environmental behaviours than those from less wealthy families. High-income households have also been shown to have a higher ecological footprint despite their pro-environmental self-identification, and for some young adults, this type of behaviour can persist even after they become independent from their families.

There is a difference between a lack of money and a lack of motivation to put the financial means available towards a more low-impact lifestyle, although in our data, only 8.4% of the respondents identified lack of motivation as a restriction for the transition. In Hungary, Zsóka et al. found that university students responded that they indeed buy fewer consumer goods but might be eager to buy more if they had the time and money. This significantly supports the value of an outreach program directed at this target group, as they are still forming their identities as consumers. Among people, there is a general fear of separating from the norm and adopting some practices that are not yet accepted by the general public, which shines a light on the need to socially normalise environmentally friendly and low-impact products, activities and behaviours.

A lack of time was also identified as a restricting factor by 33.1% of our respondents. A low-impact lifestyle does often involve the need for planning and adapting to 'miss' certain luxuries, especially for those who do not have external motivation. This is where the need for more intensive education about the impact the individual as a consumer can provide as a positive outcome and long-term encouragement for a low-impact lifestyle. However, it needs to be tackled from more than one side and at a consistent pace throughout the development of individuals. The European Union has worked on ways in which environmental awareness can be included in school curricula as a way to increase access to information, which would contribute to the needed long-term changes in the consumers' behaviour. Young people are currently intensively exposed to media and social networks in particular as the main sources for information, which has the perspective to offer another type of education and, overall, enhance their knowledge and influence their behaviour in terms of environmental issues, awareness and the possibility for individual contribution.

4.4. The Impact of COVID-19

The period in which the study was conducted coincided with the global pandemic of COVID-19 declared by World Health Organization [35]. The first results show that a pandemic can also affect the lifestyle of the population, for example, in terms of eating habits [36,37] and in the mental sphere [38]. Lockdown more than health problems seems to have caused greater lifestyle changes. Constant et al. [39] stated that up to 80% of respondents reported negative changes in lifestyle, especially restrictions on physical activity. On the other side, according to the survey of Cancellato et al. [40], more than a third of people were able to positively reorganize their lives during the forced home confinement. In the field of tourism, the attention of tourists is significantly turned to domestic tourism, which increases the turnover of visitors, while international tourism destinations are in crisis [41]. These facts affect the lifestyle of both visitors and residents of individual destinations and service providers. One of the consequences was the reduction

of traffic [42], especially aviation, which had a significant effect on reducing emissions. The question is whether some trends in discovering one's own country will persist even after the pandemic. The same is true of work from home, which also limited traffic.

We have no reason to believe that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the answers of the respondents that took part in the survey, but it did make us question the interrelationships between sustainable low-impact habits and lifestyles and the global pandemic along with its characteristics. We therefore observed the responses and reactions coming from the small sustainable businesses and local environmental NGOs in Brno. Their main channels of communication are social media, particularly Facebook, through which they continuously update their followers (i.e., consumers) about their practices. This enabled us to spot the following conclusions:

4.4.1. Environmental NGOs in Brno

Environmental NGOs in Brno reacted fast and transferred their work mainly online [43]. When possible, planned events were put in an online format. A range of online webinars, meetings and discussions was provided on the inside workings of the organisations [44], the correlation between climate change and the spread of the pandemic along with various aspects of climate change and climate crisis [45–47], the concept of community-supported agriculture and how to buy local and organic food over the internet [48]. Some posts were focused on encouraging and initiating sustainable low-impact habits that individuals can practise at home and get in the habit of doing during the pandemic [49–52] and on the possibility for online activism. Hnutí DUHA-Prátele Země Česká republika also shared information in terms of possible post-pandemic action and transition towards a green economy and initiated the first Czech Ecological Hackaton. In the middle of May, NGOs started to share in-person events that mainly took place in open spaces and returned to office work with the recommended precaution measures in mind. Although there are no data in terms of how effective this approach was, as usually the work of NGOs is focused on building tight community networks and encouraging ambiance, attempts were made to make the best of the situation. The fast response speaks greatly of the adaptability of these types of organisations, which are willing not only to accept new models but also to provide support and coordination. This model of information distribution is not sufficient to be the only way, as only people interested in the topic follow and engage, but it does serve as the first step to simply 'share' and distribute information, making space for a more practical and hands-on future approach. It can, however, engage the youth and encourage them to question their habits, become more aware of their impact and try to find suitable ways in which they can have a smaller carbon footprint, as they simply have more time for observation and action.

4.4.2. Small Sustainable Businesses in Brno

The small sustainable businesses that we looked into were three zero-waste shops that are well known in Brno. Following the announcement of a state of emergency in mid-March, they regularly informed their customers through Facebook updates of the new measurements in place such as wearing masks, a limited number of customers allowed in the shop at one time, obligatory disinfection upon entering their premises and payment with contactless cards. Some additionally opted for an order system only, provided a price list of their products and packed the orders in paper bags. They also constantly expressed their gratitude for the support of the customers during the challenging times and tried to promote other small businesses as well. Although not usually their practice, they offered the possibility for safe delivery in the local area during the quarantine for those unable to come directly to the shops. Some also offered alternatives for items that were especially in demand in the period, such as disinfectants in more sustainable packaging or by tap or ideas for food preparation with ingredients that have minimal or no packaging, as many people were cooking at home. They also used the period to regularly update their customers on their range of products and how they would be beneficial for them. As the

measures eased up, they also went back to their regular activities, such as small workshops following the measures from the government and the possibility of shopping with one's own containers.

The actions these small businesses took show that they are adaptable and an important part of the local community, as they tried to provide support for their customers and showed appreciation for the support they got in return. However, it is undeniable that in Czechia as well as the rest of the world, supermarkets are the main places where people shop. Having a wide selection, relative accessibility and convenient opening hours due to the economic model of the supermarkets, which was able to take the hit from COVID-19, are aspects that are demanded by the consumers.

Therefore, we pose this question: was COVID-19 detrimental to sustainable habits? The answer is not clear, of course, as more research is needed, but it is both yes and no. On the negative side, it showed that in times of crisis, people choose convenience, while part of them is open to sacrificing to lower their environmental impact. This is to be expected and not judged in any manner. Immense system changes are needed to change the perception of the importance of convenience over the support of local development/sustainability. However, it is here that we also see the positive side. People had time to become educated and think. They also saw the consequences and the dependencies on outside sources when the local community could not provide the resources and support needed, not only in times of crisis but also on a day-to-day level. Thinking in the long term, this might encourage the needed steps towards bigger system change.

On an individual level, COVID-19 has impacted the perception of what a household needs and how to optimise consuming goods. It is a period in which people better understand the dependencies they have and the possibilities for home activities that support sustainable lifestyles to some extent (cooking at home more, growing food at home, preserving food and managing food waste, etc.). Overall, COVID-19 has also inflicted a lesson on sustainability and what it means for us as individuals and, on the larger system level, left us with food for thought: in which direction should we move forward?

4.5. Future Recommendations

The likelihood of more pro-environmental actions could be positively impacted by increasing the environmental cues that promote, encourage and reward this type of behaviour. Higher education also has an immensely valuable role in guiding society towards the importance of sustainability, but it is also valuable to note that education can come from various sources. In terms of environmental awareness, there is a strong need for collaboration and joint initiatives between educational institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governing bodies and the private sector. Certain individual characteristics (gender, socio-economic background, involvement in natural sciences, etc.) have a relatively minor impact on individual pro-environmental behaviour, but they could be useful information when concluding strategies for its promotion. As Moser and Kleinhüchelkotten concluded, focusing on the patterns of the lifestyle rather than on specific behaviours in terms of pro-environmental behaviour could result in a better understanding of what it takes. According to the results of Mao, Koide and Akenji in consumption, the reasoning behind increased or reduced consumption matters; in infrastructure, affordability and equal accessibility is a concern; there are some uncertain implications of the changes in work and education and physical and mental health, which need further exploration.

5. Conclusions

Our study shows that among the young adults in Brno, there is a general understanding and awareness of the benefits of leading a sustainable and low-impact lifestyle. Although the respondents declared a willingness to shift towards more pro-environmental habits, they approached the issue through the prism of individual convenience, which could inhibit the actual actions. This gap between self-identification as a pro-environmentalist and leading an actual pro-environmental lifestyle can be surpassed when the wanted

behaviours are normalised and the surrounding structures that support them are available as businesses with sustainable practices in mind, infrastructure that will ease the choice and encourage them to make the low-impact decision and social circumstances that will simultaneously educate and provide spaces for open and non-judgmental discussions. Young adults need to be made even more aware of what the direct and indirect impacts of implementing a more low-impact lifestyle are and have an encouraging environment created by their intermediate surroundings, governmental programs, educational institutions and social circumstances.

It is important to acknowledge that not everywhere the opportunities for implementing sustainable habits and more low-impact lifestyles are the same. In this regard, Brno as a city offers a wide range of opportunities for young people to be more responsible consumers and, additionally, get involved in activist movements. Information is generally available but perhaps not presented directly to them, which is where we would make recommendations for future research. Understanding the channels through which the youth (in this case, but for other target groups as well) can be most efficiently approached is crucial to increase the overall awareness and provide opportunities for adopting these new habits. Understanding the limitations and opportunities in different cities as well as rural areas is also crucial in terms of having a realistic image of where there is a higher possibility for change as a starting point.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our perception of sustainable habits and has also shown the need for stable local structures. Echegaray et al. see the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in a reaction on three points: public health emergency, economic shutdown and social isolation. The experience of combating the COVID-19 pandemic leads to focusing on local sources of food and other products, reducing long-distance travel, support of SMEs and increasing the self-sufficiency of individual countries and regions. These trends are also effective from an environmental point of view. However, they are at odds with globalization trends. The main problem will be finding the optimal ratio between local and global. Glocalization is sometimes referred to in this regard. There is some hope that some of the positive environmental impacts of the pandemic will continue after the disease is managed, provided that governments take advantage of it. In Brno, it has contributed to fast and adaptable reactions from small sustainable businesses and NGOs and active involvement of individuals as consumers to support their community.

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Appendix A. Full Frequency and Descriptive Response Analysis

Questions	N	%	M	SD	Range
Socioeconomic part					
Q.1: Age	417		23.19	4.036	19–52
Q.2: Gender	417	100			
Female	275	65.9			
Male	140	33.6			
N/A	2	0.5			
Q.3: Country	417	100			
Czech Republic	374	89.7			
Other	43	10.3			
Q.4: Occupation	417	100			
Student	220	52.8			
Student + part time employee	159	38.1			
Student + full time employee	38	9.1			
Q.5: Source of income	417	100			
Employed	88	21.2			
Scholarship	12	3.1			
Home support	114	27.5			
Employed + Scholarship	28	6.7			
Employed + Home support	115	27.7			
Scholarship + Home support	21	5.1			
Employed + Scholarship + Home support	36	8.7			
N/A	2	0.5			
Q.6:Area of studies	The question was put in order to make that only students from the Faculty of Agriscience at Mendel University were taken into consideration.				
Part 1: General views of the current state of the environment					
Q.7: What are the (3) biggest threats of the environment most threatening to humanity? (multiple choice)					
Lack of food	52	12.5			
Climate change	256	61.4			
Agricultural pollution	42	10.1			
Deforestation	205	49.2			
Air pollution	156	37.4			
Water pollution	239	57.3			
Uneven food distribution	28	6.7			
Toxic waste	102	24.5			
Plastic waste	199	47.7			
Soil and land pollution	145	34.8			
Increased carbon footprint	65	15.6			
Loss of biodiversity	130	31.2			
Q.8: What do you think is the current state of the environment?	417	100	2.71	0.494	1–4
It is in a good state, I don't think there are any problems or threats.	1	0.2			
Some problems exist, but they can be solved with little effort.	125	30			
It is in a bad state, but with a lot of effort from different parties it can be saved.	284	68.1			
It is in such a bad state, that little or nothing can be done about it.	7	1.7			
Q.9: Who should be responsible for making sure we have a healthy environment?	417	100			
Industries	44	10.6			
Governments	161	38.6			
Individual people	176	42.2			
Environmental groups	4	1			
Other – All was put as an additional answer	32	7.7			

Questions	N	%	M	SD	Range
Socioeconomic part					
Q.10: Who do you see as the worst polluters that contribute to environmental damages and misbalance?	417	100			
Industries	277	66.4			
Governments	12	2.9			
Individual people	122	29.3			
Other – All was put as an additional answer	6	1.4			
Q.11: Given your current view on the state of the environment, how do you see your future?	417	100	2.39	0.799	1–4
Bright and hopeful	55	13.2			
Challenging	172	41.2			
Uncertain	162	38.8			
Depressing	28	6.7			
Part 2: Perception and awareness of sustainable low-impact habits					
Q.12: Small, everyday habits accumulate over time. According to you, how big is the impact individuals have on the environment with their habits and lifestyle?	417	100	1.52	0.654	1–4
It is quite big, accumulative over time and causes a lot of damage.	228	54.7			
It is relatively big, but the industries and the governments have more significant impact.	168	40.3			
It is moderate; there is an abundance of natural resources to support it.	13	3.1			
It is not very significant.	8	1.9			
Individuals have no impact on the environment.	0	0			
Q.13: * How familiar are you with the concept of sustainable habits and low-impact lifestyle?	417	100	2.52	1.031	1–5
Very familiar	60	14.4			
Relatively familiar	175	42			
Moderately familiar	99	23.7			
Little familiar	70	16.8			
Not familiar at all	13	3.1			
Q.14: Growing up, how prioritized were sustainable habits in your household?	417	100	2.64	0.948	1–5
Very prioritized	38	9.1			
Relatively prioritized	168	40.3			
Moderately prioritized	122	29.3			
Little prioritized	83	19.9			
Not prioritized at all	6	1.4			
Q.15: Do you consider yourself as someone who is environmentally conscious and aware?	417	100	2.01	0.572	1–5
Yes, I am very conscious and active in various ways to prevent this.	59	14.1			
Yes, I am aware but not as active as I could be on these issues.	302	72.4			
I am moderately aware.	49	11.8			
No, I don't think I am aware enough.	7	1.7			
No, I don't think I am aware at all.	0	0			
Q.16: Do you feel that everyday habits of consumption have an impact on the environment over time?	417	100	1.64	0.915	1–5
Yes, I feel that they have a very big impact and I try to be more mindful about them.	249	59.7			
Yes, I feel that they have an impact but I think there is little I can do about them.	92	22.1			
Not particularly.	63	15.1			
No, I do not feel that they have any impact.	5	1.2			
I have never thought about this issue.	8	1.9			

Questions	N	%	M	SD	Range
Socioeconomic part					
Q.17: Do you feel that your community (family, friends, local government, University, shops and businesses you regularly use) support and offer you environmentally friendly choices?	417	100	2.41	0.898	1–5
Yes, I feel I have big support and I use it often.	41	9.8			
I feel there is some level of support and I try to use it as much as possible.	236	56.6			
I feel there is some level of support but I don't use it often.	68	16.3			
I feel there is little support and I try to have more.	70	16.8			
I feel there is no support.	2	0.5			
Q.18 –A separate table with the recorded answers is provided below.					
Q.19: If there is something you do but is not mentioned in the table above, please insert it here.	There were only a few responses that could be correlated with the provided habits and were therefore not taken into separate consideration (e.g. menstrual cup is a type of reusable products, sharing individual practices with friends/family is a type of engagement in activities of environmental issues).				
Part 3: Willingness to adopt more sustainable low-impact habits					
Q.20: If you had more chances and support, do you think you would implement more sustainable practices?	417	100	1.09	0.292	1–2
Yes, I would.	378	90.6			
No.	39	9.4			
Q.21: According to you, what are the main restricting factors that prevent you from making more sustainable choices? (multiple choice)					
Lacks of money, sustainable options are more expensive.	232	55.6			
Not enough time to engage myself and make these actions habit.	138	33.1			
Not enough information about what is available around me.	109	26.1			
Lack of support from my community (family, friends, university, municipality etc.)	109	26.1			
Not a priority for me.	35	8.4			
Q. 22: Additional comments, questions or remarks.	Not relevant for the data analysis.				

* Sustainable habits and low-impact lifestyle refer to conscious efforts to reduce the individual environmental impact and the use of resources. This is usually done through daily habits and lifestyle choices that aim be supportive of the environment and the local community, from ecological, economical and social aspect.

	Very Often (Daily)	Often (Few Times per Week)	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	N/A	N
Carry reusables (water bottle, coffee cup, bags, etc.)	242 (58%)	123 (29.5%)	47 (11.3%)	5 (1.2%)	/	/	417
Avoid use of plastic bags and plastic packaging	34 (8.2%)	114 (27.3%)	154 (36.9%)	105 (25.2%)	9 (2.2%)	1 (0.2%)	417
Pay attention to consuming less animal products (meat & dairy)	58 (13.9%)	89 (21.3%)	76 (18.2%)	97 (23.3%)	95 (22.8%)	2 (0.5%)	417
Shop from local shops/markets	28 (6.7%)	100 (24%)	178 (42.7%)	94 (22.5%)	15 (3.6%)	2 (0.5%)	417
Choose local brands and products over imported ones	62 (14.9%)	133 (31.9%)	141 (33.8%)	71 (17%)	9 (2.2%)	1 (0.2%)	417
Consciously reduce the frequency of travels by plane	171 (41%)	43 (10.3%)	59 (14.1%)	47 (11.3%)	59 (14.1%)	38 (9.1%)	417
Bicycle/use of public transport/ car sharing and/or walking as primary mode of transport	214 (51.3%)	108 (25.9%)	54 (12.9%)	29 (7.0%)	12 (2.9%)	/	417
Shop from second-hand shops/sustainable brands	33 (7.9%)	49 (11.8%)	132 (31.7%)	93 (22.3%)	105 (25.2%)	5 (1.2%)	417
Shop from fast fashion brands (Zara, Mango, Promod etc.)	8 (1.9%)	34 (8.2%)	132 (31.7%)	124 (29.7%)	99 (23.7%)	20 (4.8%)	417
Recycle	227 (54.4%)	107 (25.7%)	63 (15.1%)	12 (2.9%)	6 (1.4%)	2 (0.5%)	417
Take part in campaigns and activities about environmental issues	13 (3.1%)	24 (5.8%)	83 (19.9%)	138 (33.1)	149 (35.7%)	10 (2.4%)	417

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