

Manifesto

Changing Destination

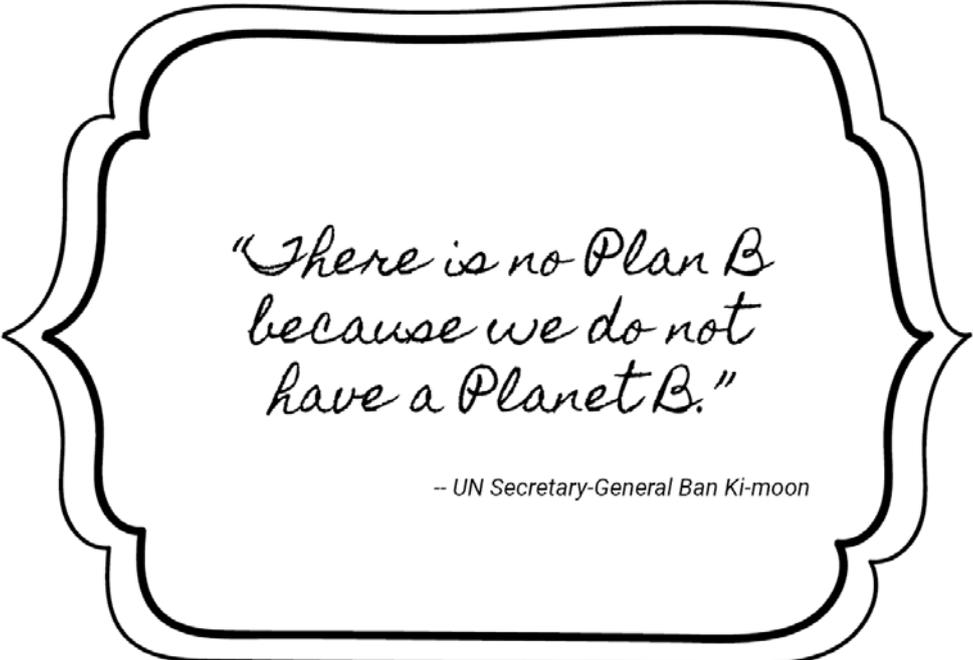
In my ideal world every person lives in a place with fresh air, clean drinking water and has enough food a happy live. Producers and consumers are more conscious about packaging and the contents of their products, all means of transport produce fewer or no polluting gases, and the world stops eating meat- and dairy products.

Environmental issues can sometimes make me feel hopeless, and frustrated with the people around me. Unfortunately we are still facing the problems of environmental pollution at this moment. Issues like the 3C world, where the UN predicts that the average temperature of the earth is going to rise with three degrees Celsius or more by the end of this century. As Jonathan Watts states in his article, *"Hundreds of millions of urban dwellers around the world face their cities being inundated by rising seawaters if latest UN warnings that the world is on course for 3C of global warming come true"*.¹ Plastic waste in the oceans, landfills, and overconsumption of meat- and dairy products are also putting pressure on the earth and it's ecosystem. For years it has been a mistake to think that because of climate change the planet is at stake and not the human race. The earth has gone through numerous climate changes, which in some cases caused massive extinctions. Soon there will be more environmental refugees because of fights over fresh water and safe land. Humans have only been around for 0.004 per cent of the earth's history. Climate change is not new to the planet, but it is for us humans.²

There are already a lot of things that have been done in the field of climate change and the prevention of it. Although people are starting to get more aware, unfortunately the problem still exists and we are still moving very slow to prevent it.³ An extra push is still needed to convince the majority of our earth's population to change their behaviour and way of thinking. With my project, Changing Destination, I want to contribute to this movement. Not by telling people what to do, but to show them that there are alternatives and what the consequences can be if we continue going in the same direction. Therefore my research question is

How can my journey to zero waste be translated into an interactive installation that influences the climate change debate and shifts the view on environmental refugees?

The goal of the project is to change the "saving the earth" perspective to saving the human race. We need to learn to co-exist with the ecosystem that supports us. *The planet can live without us.*



*"There is no Plan B
because we do not
have a Planet B."*

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Environmental refugees

What is an environmental refugee? I never thought I could become an environmental refugee, but I realised that when you are, it is already too late. Climate change does not only affect the environment, but also the stability of our governments, economies, our health, and *where we can live*.⁴ What would you do if you had to leave your house and lost all your possessions because of a natural disaster caused by climate change? Millions of people around the world have already had to answer this question.

The International Federation of Red Cross estimates that there are 25 to 50 million people on the planet that are considered environmental refugees, or climate refugees, but these people are not officially recognised as refugees by governments. The Geneva Refugee convention that was held in 1951 defines *a refugee as a person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country*. Environmental refugees are not legally included in this status.⁴

In the meantime climate change continues to affect growing regions around the world, threatening to create as many as 200 million environmental refugees by the year 2050. Master student in immigration and settlement studies at Ryerson University Sheila Murray states in her research that the developed world, which has benefited from carbon emissions for a long time, has a responsibility to the developing world. They are least able to adapt to new climate environments and have not been able to benefit as much as the developed world. Emissions that exist in the atmosphere today can persist for decades and will continue to affect the global climate. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *"Nine out of every ten natural disasters today are climate-related"*. Already ten years ago as many as 20 million people may have been displaced by climate-induced natural disasters. Still people who migrate because of gradually deteriorating living conditions are regarded as economic migrants, and as such have no recourse to any of the international instruments that otherwise protect the rights of internally displaced people, asylum seekers and refugees. The International Organization of Migrants (IOM) defines *an environmental migrant as a person who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect his live or living conditions, is obliged to leave his habitual home, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who moves either within his country or abroad*.⁵

Professor in migration, refugees, development and environmental change Richard Black, however, argues that despite the large number of environmental refugees it is not possible to separate climate causes from causes such as poverty, overpopulation, land disputes, or other factors. Black places the term "environmental refugees" in quotation marks, implying a lack of veracity. A study by Karen McNamara suggests that the work of scholars such as Black, whose critiques emphasize multi-causalities and challenge the term "environmental refugees," have allowed politicians and others to exclude the environmental from refugee research and policy.⁵ Since November of 2017 the UNHCR acknowledges some people as environmental refugees under the Geneva Refugee convention if public order is disturbed. In my research question I choose the word environmental refugee instead of environmental migrant because of the impact of the word. A migrant seems to be moving voluntarily, but a refugee has no choice. Acknowledging environmental refugees as such would in my opinion increase the need and urgency of the prevention of climate change.

One example of environmental refugees are the Inuit people in the Arctic region. This region, stretched over the USA, *Canada* and Greenland, is warming faster than any other place on earth. In 2003, after the ice formed around Christmastime, temperatures rose to four degrees Celsius and it started to rain. This had never happened before on the Arctic.⁷ The Inuit people who live there have been noticing the change and have been forced to adapt their culture to the new climate. When pursuing animals they need to be careful because the ice is thin. The water from some rivers smells, tastes bad, and is not drinkable anymore. Also the majority of Caribou, one of the food sources of the Inuit, are a lot skinnier. Another problem for the Inuit is that they have to face permafrost melting, which has destroyed the foundations of houses, eroded the seashore and forced people to move inland. There is only one positive change because of the warming climate, animals that used to live further south are moving further up north and these species could become new food sources for the Inuit.⁸ Sheila Watt-Cloutier, the chairwoman of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, which represents all 155.000 of her people inside the Arctic circle, states: *"People worry about the polar bear becoming extinct by 2070 because there will be no ice from which they can hunt seals, but the Inuit face extinction for the same reason and at the same time."*⁷



Climate change

Why have we not solved climate change yet? That is an easy question to ask, but not an easy one to answer. A lot of factors contribute to climate change and the prevention of it. Oxfam Professor of Environmental and Resource Economics Edward Miguel studied the relationship between climate change and conflict in African regions. He states that when the world is warming, it gets violent. Especially in Africa.⁹ Scientists predict a three degrees Celsius increase in temperatures or even more.¹ This is very crucial for African countries because most people rely on agriculture. The farmers depend on the rain because they don't have irrigation systems. When rain fails, the crops fail, and income plummets. A humid and dry environment together with no water means conflict and people having to leave their home. Civil war in Africa is very common, at least 80 per cent of the countries have suffered in the last decades. Professor Miguel found sixty quantitative studies to understand the link of extreme climate with violence. These studies showed that several major civilisations have collapsed during dry and hot periods, *periods we may experience in the next forty years.*⁹ We can take these findings to make implications for Africa and other dry regions, but no real solutions have been found yet. The best solution would be to not have climate change, but this is up to the developed countries. Climate change is not Africa's fault, but as their income has been increasing in the last fifteen years we will soon need five planets if they all want to live like the West lives.^{3,9}

Emeritus Professor of Geophysical & Climate Hazards Bill McGuire has researched the effect of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. He states that today's weather can bring earthquakes and magma from the Earth's crust and it does not take much to imagine how the solid Earth will respond to the environmental adjustments to the landscape. The last time the world experienced serious warming was at the end of the last ice age. Temperatures rose by six degrees Celsius and sea levels got pushed up more than 120 meters.¹⁰ If the sea level would rise in the North Sea, a bit part of The Netherlands would disappear under water. This would make me and my family environmental refugees as well.¹⁵

Unfortunately these doom and gloom messages from scientist and news reporters have not had the desirable effect on the majority of the world's population. They give great data and insights into the climate change issue but do not encourage people to actually change their behaviour. Instead the fear and guilt that people might feel makes them become more passive and it does not make them engage. As a safety mechanism we try to stop worrying and think of something else. We need to change this behaviour from apathy to action, but *how can we engage people?*¹¹

Decades of research from collaborations between neuroscientists and psychologists has found that the human brain is not wired to respond to large, slow-moving threats. The distance, in time and in space, makes it so that we cannot relate to things that might happen in twenty years or the fact that polar bears are dying on the other side of the world. It is not that we do not care, but it is just too complicated. Another factor researchers have found is *loss aversion*, which means that we are more afraid of losing what we want in the short-term than overcoming obstacles in the long-term. This built-in *bias of optimism* makes an irrational projection of sunny days in our head, in spite of the evidence to the contrary. Therefore we tend to seek for information, not to gain knowledge, but to find support for our established views.¹² On the other hand, have proven in the past that we are able to tackle bigger issues, for example the hole in the ozone layer. Because of our efforts scientists estimated that the hole will be healed around 2050.¹¹

Climate change caused by greenhouse gases and other fundamental causes are almost invisible, and the science behind it is very complicated. *These causes need to be made visible for people to act.* What has been proven to work is the use of status, metrics and friendly competition. Professor of management and psychology Elke Weber states: *“Carbon footprints have been useful because people can improve. You can actually have a positive trajectory and feel good about that. Then you can compete. Everybody likes to have that smiley face; no one likes to have that frowny face. In more rational environments you need metrics. Metrics focusing our attention on these longer time horizon outcomes and goals is what we need because we naturally focus on the here and now. We don’t need to promote that.”*¹² Social competition is a useful tool to engage people in reducing their impact on the environment. We are social creatures and we like to be the best.¹¹

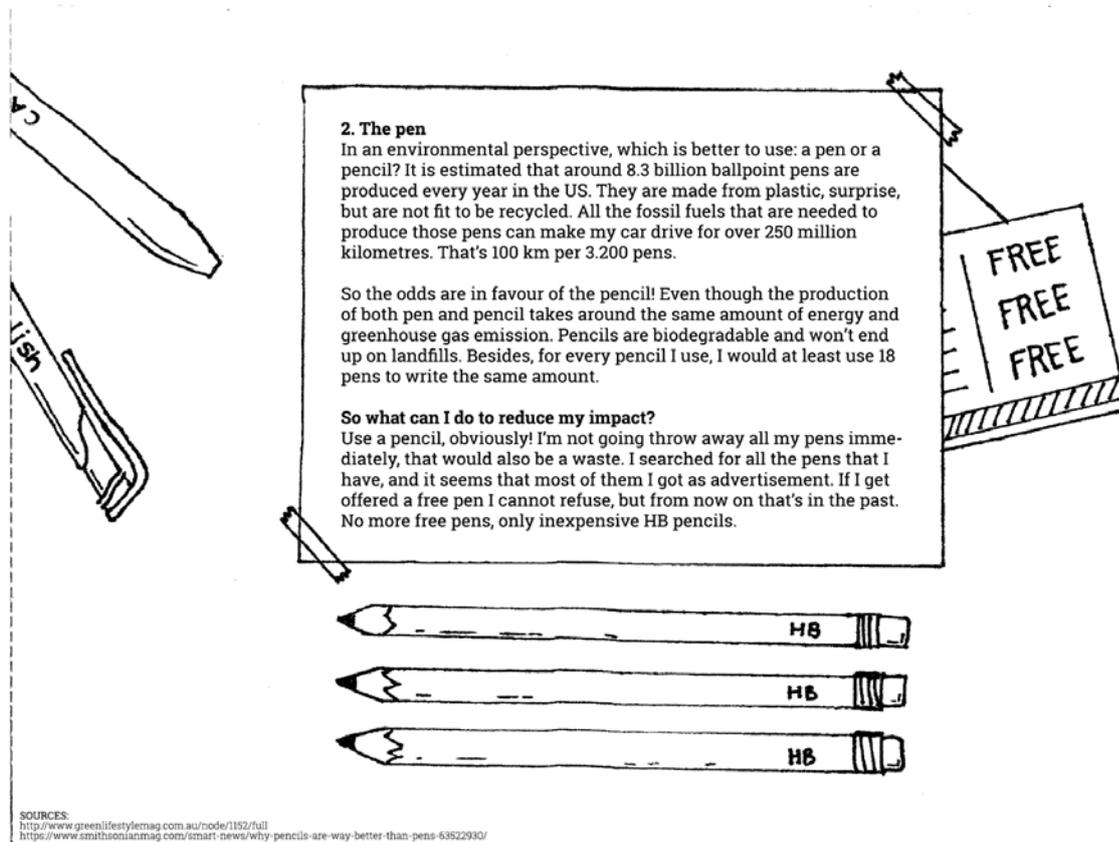
*If all the ice in Greenland were to melt,
the sea-level would rise by 6.5 meters.
Leaving 80 per cent of the cities around
the world submerged in water.*



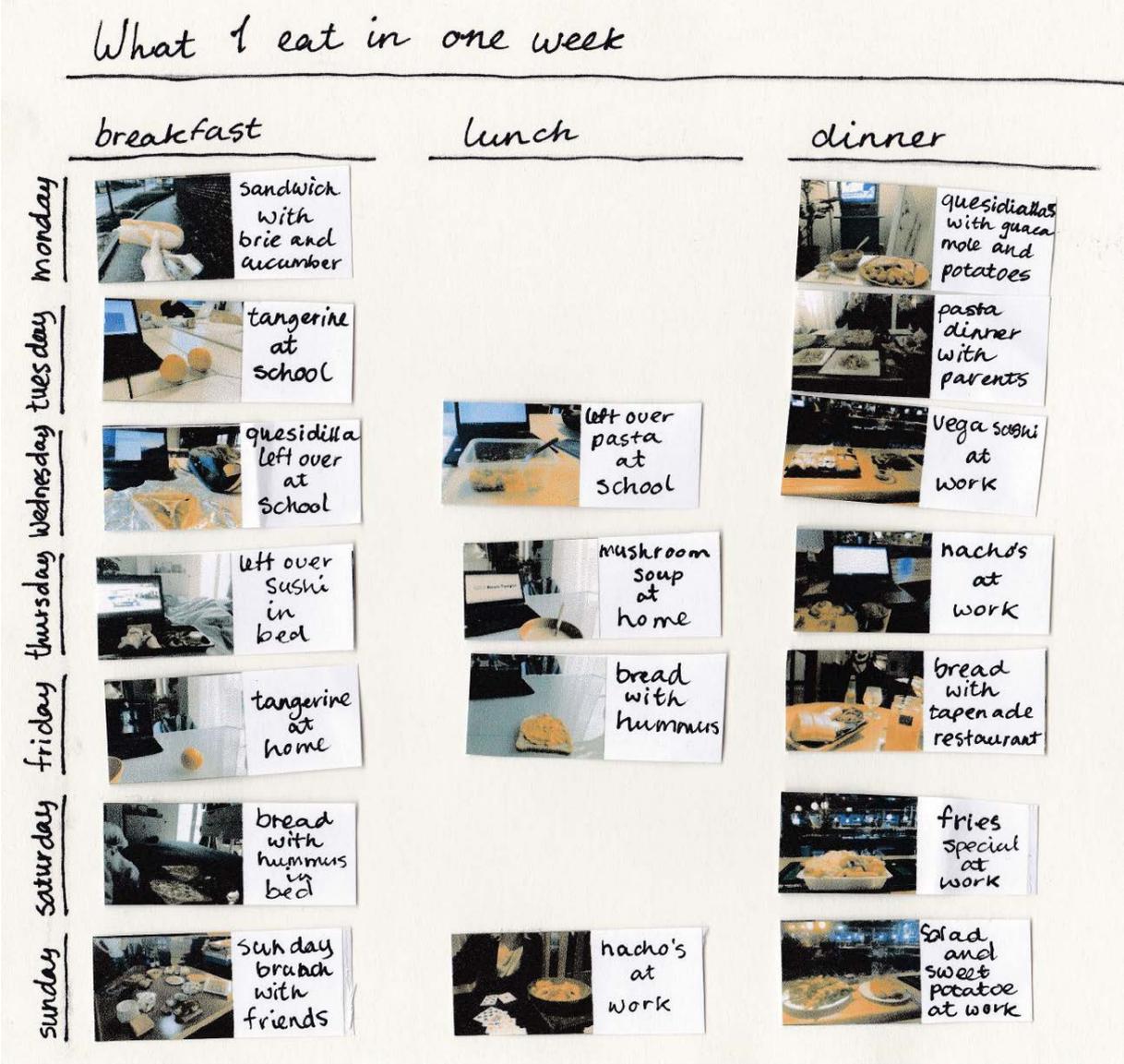
My journey

Why do I think my personal story can have an impact? Four years ago I was inspired by vegan Youtubers who advocate with their lifestyle for a better environment. I was convinced that within the month I would have eliminated all the meat- and dairy products from my diet. Unfortunately I failed because I found myself still eating meat- and dairy product now and then. It made me feel really bad about myself seeing these people on YouTube and Instagram, like Ellen Fisher and Alyse from Raw Alignment. They were able to reach this goal and look so perfect. *It made living a vegan lifestyle an almost unattainable goal.* Having done more research over the years, I recently adding a zero waste lifestyle to the list. Although I am still struggling with the temptations after three years, I feel less guilty about it. In a recent interview with Annelies Falk, who has been a vegan for over five years, I learned that a 100 per cent is not realistic but 95 per cent is good enough. By putting too much pressure on yourself, doing the right thing becomes a burden.

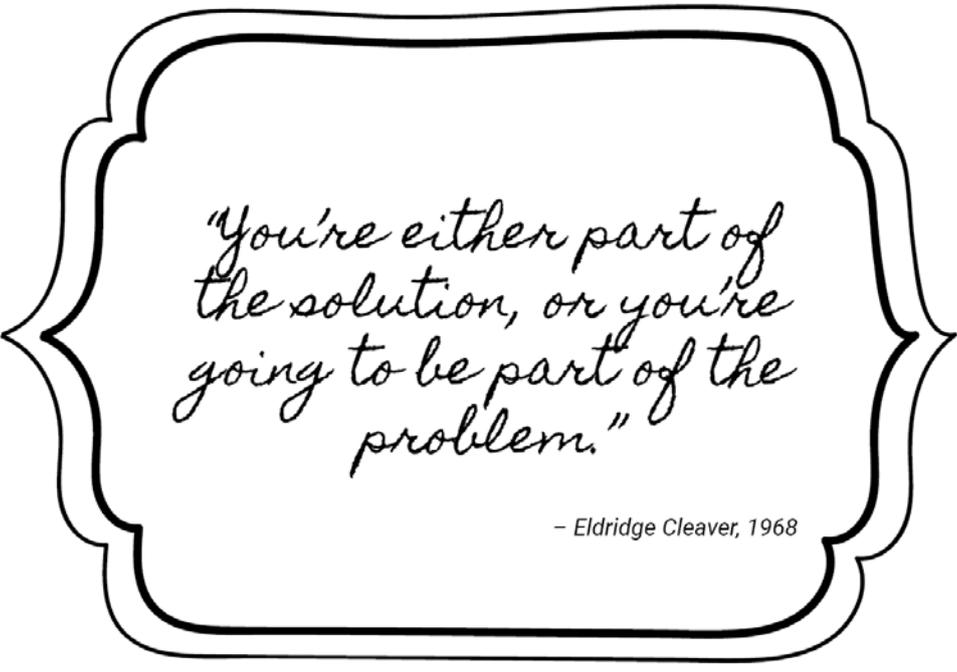
With this positive attitude I try to write my one hour observations because critical thinking does not necessarily has to mean negative thinking. When I notice I can do something better in my daily life, I take one hour of my time to research and write a short, digestible story about it. The stories are personal and relatable to my friends. They too are trying to apply some of the things I tried into their life. The goal of the stories is to make an easy step by step transition to a zero waste lifestyle.



Besides observing my daily actions and the things I use, I am also documenting the food I eat. Taking inspiration from Tim Gaudreau, who photographed everything he threw away in one year and made an art piece of the pictures. The project made clear for him that even someone who is eco conscious still sends a lot of trash to a landfill.¹³ For Gaudreau the project was an eye opener and it gave him insides into his own life he never realised. I believe that being confronted with your own behaviour is the best way to change that behaviour. That is also what I found with my pictures. Every last week of the month I take a picture of every meal I have. Combining them all together made me realise that I was not eating as healthy and eco-friendly as I thought I was. The collages of pictures are reminders for me that I can do better, and through time progress can be made.



These minor changes in my life create a low threshold for me to do better. They do not create a perfect picture, but an attainable goal. By showing them to other people I hope they too can be motivated to change their behaviour.



*"You're either part of
the solution, or you're
going to be part of the
problem."*

- Eldridge Cleaver, 1968

Reflection

We tend to separate us humans from nature, but nature can be viewed as an ecology that has the ability to support the existing population. In another way nature can be viewed as a world ecology and the right of all individuals, including future generations to have access to all aspects of life. However we view the link between humans and nature, we need to find an ecological balance between the two.⁵ Our goals as humans is survival, but in the meantime we need to learn to co-exist with the ecosystem that supports us.

This research project is about environmental issues and the impact a single person can have on his or her ecological footprint. That something has to change in our mentality and behaviour towards climate change is a fact. There are still obstacles that prevent the majority of the earth's population from changing behaviour and political policies towards sustainability, which can also be driven by economic reasons.¹⁴ With this project I'm collecting data through my own life by one hour observations of my behaviour, the products I use and the food I eat. An interactive installation or game can be used to communicate these stories. Through social competition participants are encouraged to rethink their view on climate change and environmental refugees, but more research has to be done to find the best way how. For this research I want to use data gathered from expert interviews and first-hand experience of environmental refugees to answer my research question, *"How can my journey to zero waste be translated into an interactive installation that influences the climate change debate and shifts the view on environmental refugees?"*. The project is about combining my personal story and the experience of climate change in an interactive installation with the goal to connect humans to nature, immerse the spectator into a simple storyline that holds a mirror and sets reasonable goals to take action.

Notes

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