

Student story: Hedda Werres

The sun is rising slowly behind the palm trees, the tropical air is warm and clean. I step into the water and start paddling over the reef. Stroke by stroke I navigate my board through plastic bags, metal cans, flip-flops, and used nappies. The smell is disgusting. I don't surf for long. The next few days I feel sick. The infection in my ears has reached a new level and I have to spend most of my time on the toilet.



Indonesia was an eye-opening experience for me. I had just finished school and spend a year abroad in Australia. Indonesia was my dream destination. I love to spend my time in nature, surfing, swimming, and hiking. The Australians love the Indonesian islands. They told me about the beautiful clear water, the lush green forests, and the amazing surf. What they did not tell me was how polluted most of the islands are. I was completely unprepared for the amount of rubbish on land and in the water. Looking back, I think not knowing about the issue is what still shocks me more than the fact that the islands are drowning in trash.

When I came back from my trip, I kept thinking I must do something about the issue. How can it be that so many people are ignoring where their trash goes? Still, I did not really become active until about two years after. Of course, I immediately tried to reduce my plastic waste. I started to eat fully Vegan and I tried to soak up all the information that is out there about the pollution problem. I made a lot of changes in my personal life, but I felt like I was still not doing enough. After all, what can I as a single person change?

I think many people can relate to this feeling. We don't know where to start and if we make a change it does not feel enough. I started to get really frustrated with myself. My motivation to learn about sustainability and make a change dropped. It reached a point where I was questioning if it is worth aiming for more sustainability at all.

Then I moved to Leiden to study psychology. One of the main reasons to choose Leiden was that it is close to the ocean and it is possible to surf. The surfers I met in the Netherlands were very engaged in the topic of ocean pollution and sustainability. Most of them were active in an environmental organization and they regularly invited me to join their beach clean-ups and activities. I think this was the point where I realized how important it is to exchange your thoughts and ideas with others. I reached out to multiple organizations and started to meet a lot of very active and inspiring people.

Reaching out to people and sharing your ideas is probably the one thing I would recommend to anyone who wants to be more sustainable and engage in the topic. I know it sounds simple

but, exchanging ideas and working on projects with like-minded people gives you so much new input and pushes you to give your best possible.

This is something I also really value about LUGO. Staying up to date with the events and activities of LUGO gives me a lot of inspiration. I see LUGO as this really cool platform that everyone at Leiden University can exchange their ideas on how to create a more sustainable university. For me personally writing for the LUGO blog is a big chance. It gives me a platform to share my ideas about how psychology is related to the climate crisis and sustainability. I believe that connecting different areas of studies to the issue of sustainability is the key to come up with solutions for the climate and pollution problem. Saying that I am super excited to share more about how psychology and sustainability are connected and of course to read more about the connection of other areas to sustainability.