
Northern paper over-consumption promoting green deserts in the South

World demand for paper and paperboard is expected to grow by 2% to 3% annually in the long term, with significant growth potential for Asia and Eastern Europe - India, China and Russia in particular. Paper pulp exports from Latin America from lands converted into monoculture tree plantations, so called "green deserts", are expected to grow by 70% between 2000 and 2010.

Timber, pulp, sugar cane and agrofuels are all exported from the global South for consumption in Northern countries, earning vast profits for transnational companies. But the large-scale plantation industries have a host of negative social, environmental and economic impacts: they displace local people, devastate biodiversity, exhaust water resources, use a land which could potentially be used for farming, impoverish workers, farmers and communities.

Even though paper is essential for modern communication, there is a needless consumption of paper in Northern countries. The demand is unevenly distributed: 72% of the world's paper is consumed by the 22% of the world's population living in the US, Europe and Japan. What is more alarming is that this excessive consumption is not always justified.

This over-consumption is as for many other goods, due to unnecessary needs or uses, as shown by the few following examples:

- Development of disposable products such as napkins or paper cups.
- Useless printings within corporations: according to a Lexmark and Ipsos study in Europe, only half of the interviewed companies have changed their printing strategies and only 12% have made financial investments to encourage employees to better manage their printings. Hence, it is not surprising that most of European employees think they might reduce their printings up to 30%, especially when almost half of all print-outs and photocopies are binned before the end of the day (see <http://www.shrinkpaper.org>). Even if the number of prints decreased in the last two years, each European employee still prints an equivalent of 35kg per year.
- Packaging and over-packaging: today packaging accounts for half of the world's paper use. The French national center of independent information for waste, estimates that in France packaging generates 5 million tons of waste every year. Most of the waste is recycled but more than 50% is incinerated, causing a threat for soil, water, air and people's health. As for excessive printing, most of the packaging used today could be spared, for instance the numerous individual packaging and small conditioning that are very "fashionable" nowadays.
- Junk mail: the enormous amounts of junk mail we receive at our homes give us the idea that paper is a free resource. Only in France, every year 18 billions of printed prospectuses are sent to the mailboxes, the equivalent of 40kg of paper for each household. If 5% of people could choose not to receive junk mail, 150 millions Euros spent in waste treatment could be saved.

That is why Friends of the Earth - Paris organized last September a denunciation action aimed at increasing awareness of deforestation, its links with tree plantations and the excess of advertising. For the International Day Against Tree Monocultures, the local group invited artists Barbara Hashimoto and Andrew Chartier to present their work at the Krajcberg Space. Hashimoto's ongoing

environmental art project began in 2007 in Chicago when she collected and shredded every piece of junk mail sent to her studio for a year. In 2009 with Friends of the Earth Paris “The junk mail experiment” involved 200 children from a local school into collecting the junk mail they received at their homes for several months, Barbara Hashimoto made Parisian public become aware of the incredible amount of paper they receive in their mailbox. Andrew Chartier explores the links between technology, art and environment through his work. In the Paris exhibition he presented his tree machine which gives a tree shoot in exchange for a piece of paper: too bad that this reverse mechanism is just a dream!

The stake nowadays is really in reducing drastically paper over-consumption, avoiding deforestation and land occupation due to the implementation of large scale monoculture tree plantations. If only the northern countries watched to stop consuming paper for pointless purposes, it would be a tremendous saving for forests and a precious gain for humanity as well.

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