



## 2020 Theme: Waste

When we hear of waste, we usually think of smelly landfills and overflowing trash cans, of plastic bottles and plastic bags floating in the oceans. In general we think of things we throw away and don't need or want anymore, things we use for five minutes, like a coffee-to-go cup, or things like T-shirts that are meant to last multiple years but don't because they have become a feature of the short-lived, fast fashion industry.

It is a myth that we can throw things away. Even if we do, they are still here and don't disappear. Even if they are out of sight and out of mind for us, they end up some place else, possibly at the other end of the

planet. Yes, we even literally dump our waste, specifically plastics and electronics, on countries in Africa, to China, or to Indonesia. Then, we either complain about environmental pollution in lands far away, or, if we care enough to know, have a guilty conscience if we see children roaming through our disposed mobile phones or computers in a giant garbage dump, risking their health by inhaling poisonous fumes to salvage some raw materials and make a few cents. ***In our daily lives most of us are careless wastrels, and our biggest problem is the failure to take advantage of what we know and act accordingly, thereby ignoring our knowledge about how we can do better.***

As a result, we not only waste "stuff," but we also waste ***opportunities, attention, time, words***. Vaclav Smil, professor emeritus at the University of Manitoba has stated:

"I never blog. I just write my books. The world these days seems afflicted with graphomania — the obsession for self-expression through writing — telling everyone what you know or pretend to know. There are half a billion people today blogging regularly! I am happy to take 12-15 months to write my books. I just don't have something new to say every afternoon."

We spend a lot of time, even though we constantly claim that we don't have enough of it, with our eyes glued to a screen, any screen – TV, mobile phone, tablet, computer. Instead of consulting credible sources, we are on Instagram and Snapchat, read blogs and tweets, unfortunately often written by people who are not experts on the topics they are writing about. We've heard it often, 'The mind is a terrible thing to waste', but preventing this from happening is a challenge when we find ourselves surrounded by a civilization of waste. It requires a deliberate effort to break the vicious circle.

*One important part of our programs in addition to the presentations and offsite excursions is group work, when participants break into smaller discussion groups. In 2020, we want these groups to each zoom in on one of the different aspects of waste.*