

EKO – Youth Exchange Participants' Report



COVID-19 effects on our planet: A perspective of the Greek team of young people

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What can the COVID-19 pandemic teach us concerning climate change?

First of all, climate change is like an invisible monster that no one, no state can, and probably does not want, to stop. It is an invisible enemy which is growing throughout the years. But lately another invisible enemy of humanity has struck us where no one expected it, with a pandemic that has changed the facts of all countries worldwide. Corona virus has a huge impact on our societies, economies, politics and last but not least, on our health and wellbeing.

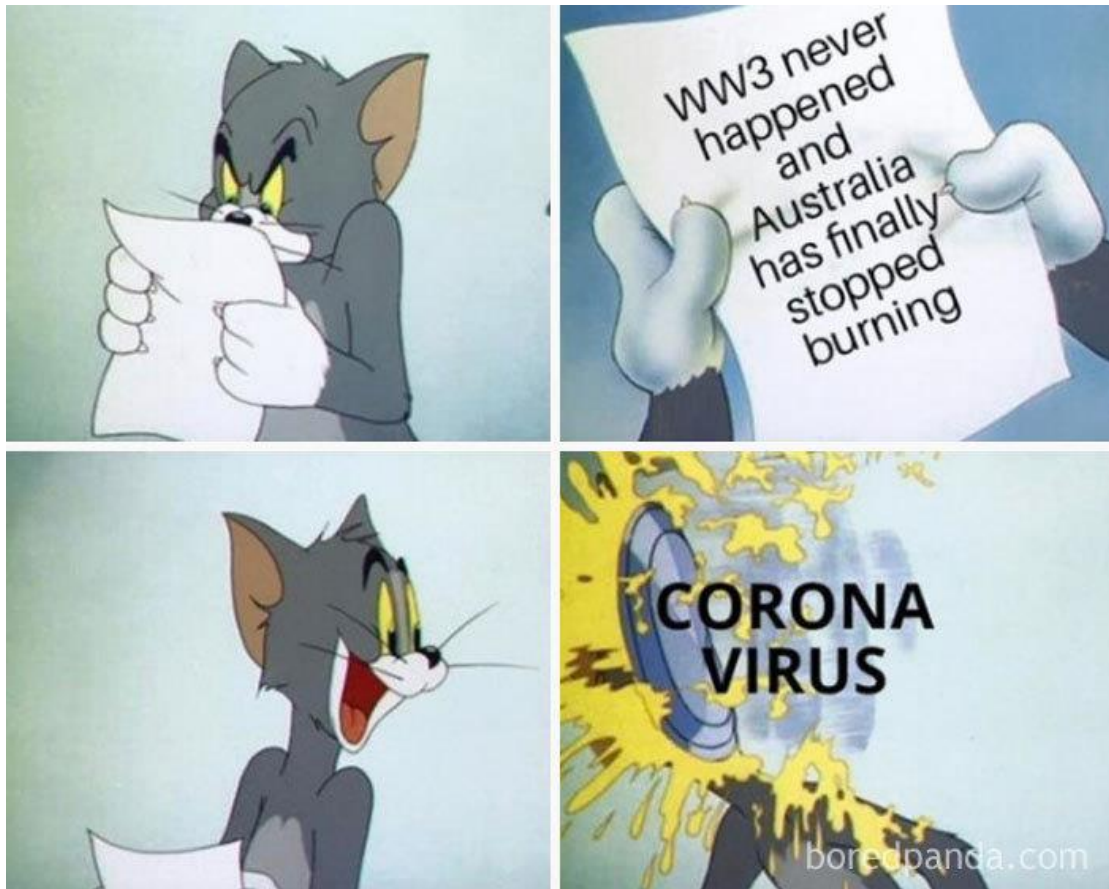
During this outbreak, everyone can think what the impact of the pandemic might be on climate change in relation to emissions, politics and social change.

The lockdown, the restriction of human activities, the sharp decline in vehicle traffic and industrial production and the mass cancellation of flights have contributed to the reduction of air pollution. Many pictures have been shared on Internet depicting how polluted was the air before COVID19 and how it cleared during the quarantine in several cities around the world.

But, this phenomenon might be extremely ephemeral. It is believed that shortly after the pandemic, people will return to their ordinary life and the CO₂ emissions will increase. This is true actually, considering that in China, where people have started over; the sky is already getting hazed. Obviously, reduced emissions are something desirable, yet a worthwhile action towards a healthier planet includes decisions which will bring a long-term change such as using green energy instead of fossil fuels. This pandemic will probably create the wrong impression that if the skies are clean now, they will be uncontaminated in the long run as well.

Right now, they are the countries and their people that serve as guinea-pigs and not mice in some laboratory. The corona virus outbreak is an emergency and many short-term emergency measures will be taken by the governments based on the social experiments they conduct in order to find the best solution, which is not necessarily efficient, because stopping the spread of COVID19 is crucial, but is not the main long-term concern. All the global efforts for addressing climate change are delayed due to COVID19 and although it will cease to exist, climate change will continue.

Moreover, if we assess what situation we are in, we may realize that we let the environment breathe only when a huge outbreak comes alive and it causes large recessions in economies, as it happened in 2008, with the great economy crisis hitting the world and given that people were travelling much less, emissions had fallen again. The point is that we live in a capitalist society and the ultimate aim is unfortunately, money. In 2003 it was the SARS outbreak, in 2012 it was the MERS outbreak, today is COVID19 and in few years another deadly virus will appear. Our main goal must be raise awareness of environmental protection and make people comprehend that we do not need any virus or recession to happen so that we use less our vehicles or manufacturing less products and eventually lighten up the atmosphere.



We live in the 21st century and that means we have countless opportunities to change the cities we live in and convert them to smart and innovative hubs by reducing car use, multiplying green spaces and supplying citizens with open spaces to express themselves and cultivate their body, mind and spirit. If people come to terms with the fact that they are causing their own death by harming the environment, then it is impossible to live in a sustainable world no matter how many viruses will appear.

Lastly, humans are part of this planet and they cannot stay indoors forever. Maybe our main concern should not be if corona virus was a real threat to this planet but if our governors can be leaders and not bosses and create a functioning economy with respect to environment and humans. Above all, we have to come to a deeper understanding of what this world means to us and why we are acting selfishly and harming our own "home". We have to exploit this lockdown as a last chance to build a more sustainable future with peace and love.



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