

On The Way ADEME – Transcription EN

00:25:56:06 – 00:26:05:16 “So the question is, “Is it better to use repair services that create local jobs rather than manufacturing services that create jobs in China?”

Commenté [GD1]: je choisirais celle ci phrase au début

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Well, hello On The Way! My name's Raphaël Guastavi. I'm the Deputy Director of the Circular Economy Department, at the French Agency for Ecological Transition, called ADEME. My story is really rather straightforward. First and foremost, I'm a biologist. I studied Life Sciences as part of my biology degree. And it was that subject of Life Sciences that quite logically led me to the environment, and to ask myself the question, what, in the end, is the impact of humans on the environment, and on ecology?

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I started out in this direction, specialising in waste: household waste, its processing, and in particular, processing organic waste. Which, quite naturally, and with a lot of luck, led me to start work at ADEME, a little over 20 years ago, in the regional management in Alsace, working with local authorities specifically on the question of waste management.

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So my ecological awakening happened during my studies, because when you study Life Sciences, at a certain point, you begin to ask yourself questions about human impact on the world around us. And by specialising in this field, I realised that we really do have a significant impact. I needed to find a way of reducing that environmental impact, by working with the people who are directly in control of things.

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ADEME, the French Agency for Ecological Transition, is a public body that's been around for over thirty years and that works on all aspects of the ecological transition, including climate issues, mobility issues, the construction industry, and also the circular economy, which is my area. On a day to day basis we work with local authorities and with businesses.

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We also run communications campaigns aimed at the general public, to make people aware of the ecological transition and provide expertise and information about the latest developments in these areas. We also provide funding for projects to accelerate this transition. ADEME is rather unique in Europe, in the sense that we've got a range of expertise on a large number of topics concerning the environment.

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In other European countries or even internationally, there are ADEME equivalents, but they're based around single topics. And that's what really makes our agency here in

France different: essentially, we've grouped together all our energy and our circular economy, waste and air quality expertise into one single public agency. When you're working on the circular economy, you're looking to understand environmental impacts over the entire life cycle of a product.

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So what is the product life cycle? Basically, it covers the design and manufacturing phase. That's one phase, then there's shipping the product to the user. Then of course there's its use. And then there's the end of life. When you look at all of these major parts of a product's life cycle, you're looking to understand what its environmental impact is, so that means its impact in terms of greenhouse gases, as well as resource consumption at each phase.

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And by doing that, you soon realise that the manufacturing phase is very often the phase that has the most impact from an environmental point of view. So, logically, if you extend the lifespan of those products, you're delaying the use of a new product, and therefore the sale of a new product, and possibly the manufacture of a new product.

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So that means that delaying it for as long as possible, this new cycle that uses resources and energy to design and manufacture these products. This goes some way to reducing the environmental impact of products, which we're trying to get people to use for longer. We've published various studies, including one that measures the environmental impact of certain consumer goods products. And, in fact, we've all got examples of those in our own homes.

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For example, the study shows that manufacturing televisions has an impact of about 400 kilograms of CO2 equivalent, if that television lasts for eight years. And in the same way, what materials are used in the construction of that television? A television weighs about 11 kilograms.

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But to make one, we use 2.5 tonnes of materials for each television. That's just huge. And that shows something of the environmental impact that's hidden behind consumer goods. Similarly, a smartphone will account for over 30 kilos of CO2 equivalent, on the basis of using it for four years, and they're often used for less than that. And again, in terms of materials, we use over 200 kilograms of materials to make a smartphone, which only weighs about 150 grams.

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So you can really see that the manufacturing phase is the most impactful. It accounts for 80 percent of the environmental impact, while the distribution phase accounts for 10 to 20 percent, depending how products are shipped to consumers. And the use phase, notably in terms of power consumption, has a minimal impact. Depending on the device, it's between 2 to 15 percent of the overall impact.

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So you've got to bear in mind that the manufacturing phase accounts for over 80 percent of the impact.

To extend the lifespan of products, there are various ways of addressing the issue. Of course the first issue is responsible consumption, which aims to dissuade people from buying new products, or buying too many products. So that's that what you can do on a day to day basis: quite simply not buy a new device, when the one you already have still works.

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That's the first thing. The second thing, if you really have to buy a product, is what you're going to buy. Do you buy a new product, or do you choose something that's been repaired or refurbished? So that notably means refurbished devices, that come with a guarantee for buyers.

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So that's pretty interesting. Then of course you've got second hand. Those aren't necessarily refurbished products. And then, if something breaks, you can maybe get it repaired. And here there are various solutions. Either you can repair it yourself, if you're a bit handy, and the problem's not too complicated. Or you can use independent repairmen or approved repairmen, or use the after-sales services of major distributors or manufacturers, who can carry out these very useful repairs that render your device almost as good as new.

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So in the end it's important to adopt a circular economy mindset, that aims to extend the length of use of products, that saves resources, and that also often comes with financial savings. And ultimately being able to benefit from the service you get from the device. So what's interesting is that we tried to measure the habits of French people in terms of repairs.

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Currently, according to our survey, 85 percent of French people consider repairing when a device breaks. Perfect! So you might think it's all good, it's a win, everyone gets their devices repaired. But when you dig a bit deeper with your questions, it turns out that in the end only 30 percent of French people actually get their devices repaired. Because unfortunately, repairs often raise a question, notably that of cost.

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"Well, the spare part was too expensive." It was too expensive compared to the price of a super new device that was on sale. And so that's the first obstacle to repairs. Then there's also the question of obsolescence, or at least perceived obsolescence. "Well, there's a new model of my device now. The new model is so much better. It comes in a much nicer colour." So sometimes obsolescence is perceived, and it's not necessarily real obsolescence. There might also be real obsolescence in terms of software. So it can be

an issue with new software, or software that's updated too frequently. And then might also be a lack of spare parts.

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Fortunately, that's less and less often the case, overall. And it's often devices that are over ten years old, where spare parts aren't available. And so you can't repair things in those cases. It's frustrating. So then you come to the end of the product's life. And if it's really unusable, then you have to send it to be recycled.

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And here's there's quite simply a lack of information. People don't always know that devices can be repaired. People aren't always aware that it's possible, which is why we've set up a web platform, "Epargnonsnosressources.gouv.fr", that allows users to locate repair-people.

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And it's important to be aware that it's always possible to find that information. And also, to remember that in the end, repairing is an ecological act. It's good for the economy and it also maintains employment. It maintains local employment. Right now, we need to have more and more repairmen. There's a real need to also develop training, so that we can have artisan repairmen, who have increasingly technological jobs, as our everyday products are increasingly technological. So it's no longer the old image of the neighbourhood repairman, who's a little guy in a flat-cap. It's really becoming an ever more qualified job, and I think more and more interesting. There's a real expectation from citizens, consumers, and also businesses, who themselves now have obligations to make products last longer, along with the creation of a Repair Fund and a Reuse Fund, to support these sectors in extending the duration of use of products.

Musical interlude

This study, which allowed us to examine the obstacles to repairs, also allowed us to look at ways of promoting repairs. In the end, what encourages consumers to go and get their products repaired?

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Of course the first element is economic. Because, despite everything, fortunately a repair costs less than buying a new product. Unless you really have an issue with a part that's very, very expensive. The lower cost of a repair compared to getting a new product is one way of encouraging people. What promotes repairs is having access to repairmen.

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So we're working on that. In the end it's good for people to be aware that they can go to an artisan repairman, so that encourages people to get their products repaired. So that's something that's also the role of local authorities and public authorities, showcasing these repair businesses. What will promote repairs, is transparency in terms of the spare parts market.

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We've all heard, and it's also been shown that certain brands tend to want to keep a monopoly on original spare parts, and limit repairs only to those original parts. But in reality, you could also have standard spare parts, spare parts from the circular economy, and so second-hand spare parts, and ultimately you could access a stock of spare parts.

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And so of course repairmen need to get organised, and the various sectors need to get organised, in order to do all this. And then, what also promotes repairs and attracts consumers, is guaranteeing repairs. Because there's a worry that repaired products might quickly break again. Providing a guarantee is something that rather logically favours and reassures consumers.

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And then finally, there's providing information to consumers about the level of reparability of the products they might want to purchase. And so that's notably about creating the reparability index, within the framework of the circular economy law. So that was created in 2020, and was rolled out for the first products in 2021.

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So what's interesting to see is that this reparability index, which is a world first, was created together with all of the stakeholders. With the public authorities, with ADEME, with the Ministry of Ecology, and with the stakeholders, meaning federations and brands, in order to produce a rather pragmatic index, that lets people assess the level of reparability of products.

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So right now it applies to washing machines, smartphones, laptops, televisions, electric lawn mowers, dishwashers, pressure washers, cordless and corded vacuum cleaners and food processors. So there you go. What's also interesting is that it's an iterative process, meaning that an ever-increasing number of product categories are being covered.

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And as I mentioned, it's a world first: we implemented the system after the law was passed. There were so many requests for intervention: from Australia, from European countries, from the United States, from pretty much everywhere, who were really very surprised that we'd been able to legislate such a tool. So there's real interest from all around the world about this issue. And that's positive, as the idea is that we reach French manufacturers, but of course that we also reach manufacturers from everywhere, and who are multinationals. So we absolutely have to be able to engage with all these companies in this effort to improve reparability. Because the whole point is not just giving ratings at one particular moment, but making sure that they improve their ratings on their products, and so they improve the design of their products.

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The idea is to have a shared set of criteria for all electrical and electronic products. And then there are specific criteria for each of the product categories. Because of course you don't repair a television and a lawn mower in quite the same way. So documentation is one of the main points that's rated.

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"Are all the elements there to be able to repair this product? How do you disassemble it? How do you repair it? What parts do you need to look at?" The second point is how easy it is to disassemble the product and access its parts. "Do you need specific or standard tools?" There you go. You can see that there are certain brands that tend to use very specific connections. And so these need specific tools to disassemble them.

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So those get a lower score. Then there's the availability of spare parts over the longer term. "Will I be able to repair my product over the long term, and after its legal guarantee expires?" There's also a score for the price of spare parts. That's a very important element. Because, basically, if you break the panel on a television, it's a very, very expensive part to replace, and it's almost the cost of the television itself.

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So that has to be taken into account in terms of repairs. And then the fifth element is the specific criterion that applies to the category of product being assessed. So, for example, this might be a usage counter, or having the option to reinitialise software.

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All these elements get a rating, which the manufacturers calculate themselves. Currently, the government is starting to carry out checks to ensure that these calculations are carried out in good faith. And they're also going to check whether distributors are playing fair, by displaying these scores on their shelves, which is compulsory. And they're also checking whether sellers are communicating the complete indexes, which is also an obligation.

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If you buy a product and you want to know the detailed index, you can request it. At ADEME, we haven't yet really assessed the consequences of implementing the reparability index, as it's still pretty new. Not very long ago, the Ministry of the Economy published an article about these first checks, to see how this index was implemented in real life.

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There seems to be room for improvement. The checks highlighted the fact that not all of the obligations, notably in terms of distributors, were being implemented. So there's room for improvement in terms of the positioning of the index in shops. There's also room for progress in terms of the calculations, and in making the entirety of the indexes available to consumers.

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So that's the glass half empty side of things. The glass half full aspect is that, while clear evaluations are needed, we're still seeing a gradual increase in the ratings of new products on the market. So that's interesting. It shows that manufacturers have been taking these rating indexes into account. Getting to grips with them, and improving their scores. So maybe initially it's the low-hanging fruit: for example, providing documentation.

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Those sorts of things are easier. But it's also the design. In terms of design, it will be easy to change batteries again. You'll be able to use standard tools, and not special tools for each brand. These things are moving in the right direction, and they show that the system is being taken on board. And all the more so as this reparability index will also begin to be extended on the European level, with the implementation of a European reparability index for certain product categories.

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From a practical point of view, I think that these days everyone has seen them at least once. It's a numerical index, rated from 0 to 10, with a colour code. So in fact there are coloured grades. This is also something that needs to be developed to take into account the evolution of products on the market. And to make sure that there's an increasingly clear distinction between the least and the most repairable products.

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So as I mentioned earlier, the people who sell products, the manufacturers, are now required to help extend the useful life of their products. And two tools have been created for this: a Reuse Fund and a Repair Fund. This Repair Fund is essentially a part of the eco-contribution that you pay when you buy new products, which is later returned to consumers. It comes back in the form of a Repair Bonus from approved repairmen.

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So, for example, one day your smartphone breaks. You go to an approved repairman, approved by QualiRépar, who provides a repair service. And this service is cheaper, thanks to the Repair Bonus and the Repair Fund. That means that instead of paying for 100 percent of the service, you pay 75 percent, thanks this fund.

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So it's actual money. For you, this amount is totally transparent. It's what is charged by the repairman, who deducts the amount of the bonus from your bill. So there's no complex paperwork for you to do, or anything like that. You just get a cheaper service, thanks to the Repair Fund. A certification has been put in place to make sure that the repairmen who use the Repair fund are serious repairmen who will repair your product well and properly, and a certification system has been introduced. This certification depends on the sector, meaning the type of product. So right now, there are notably repairmen for electrical and electronic products, who have to be QualiRépar certified. It's a private certification, that reassures users, and also reassures the people putting products on the market, that products are being properly repaired.

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You can find the list of qualified repairmen online, notably on the websites of the eco-organisations for these sectors, and in particular of the ecosystems for the QualiRépar certification. And you can also find these approved repairmen on the “Épargnonsnosressources.gouv.fr” website, with an interactive map of where they are located. The advantage of this website is that you have the electrical and electronic equipment section, as well as other sections, notably clothing.

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Because clothing is also covered by the Repair Fund. It's the same principle: approved repairmen. Repairmen provide a reduced-cost service thanks to this bonus. It's clearly important to make people aware of this system that promotes repairs, that helps financially with repairs, as we clearly saw that one of the obstacles to repairs is cost. The aim is to reduce that cost, so as to increase the number of products being repaired. So that means making people aware of this goal of repairing things, and ultimately reducing purchases of new products. There's a fundamental issue of environmental awareness, and getting people to think about their needs first, before going and buying a new product.

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So that's the first point, you need to be aware. Then, there's making products last, so by maintaining them properly, so as to prevent them from breaking. Because you've got to remember that about 50 percent of breakdowns come from a lack of maintenance or upkeep. So you can avoid needing to have repairs done in the first place.

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Once you've dealt with that side of things, there are always products that break a few years after the commercial legal guarantee runs out. So then people need to know about what repair options there are. And so at ADEME, we've launched a communication campaign. We launched another communication campaign, because in fact every three years we run a new campaign about the circular economy.

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The previous one was specifically about extending product lifetime. We already had this particular focus on reuse and repair, even though the fund didn't exist before, we've already been talking about it for some time. And then we launched this campaign at the end of last year, which notably showcased sellers who were specifically focused on rethinking consumption.

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“Do you really need to buy another piece of clothing you already have? Do you really need to buy a device that you'll use for ten minutes, rather than renting it? And when your washing machine breaks down, do you really need to buy a new one, or can you try to get it repaired?” So that was really the idea of message. It was about saying: let's think about our ways of consuming, and that we can definitely meet our consumption needs in other ways than buying new products.

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And we accompanied the campaign with a website “ÉpargnonsnosRessources.gouv.fr”, (“Save Our Resources” in English) which notably has a search engine that includes lots of useful addresses near your home, and that provides information on how to borrow, rent and get your products repaired.

Musical interlude

Our aim for this communication campaign was to make people aware that we’re the ones holding the key. We hold the key, as consumers. You often hear “yes, but companies should do it.” That’s true.

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Companies have to do better. They have to stop selling us things that need to be re-bought too frequently. That’s the fashion world. But it’s still the consumer who has the last word, who’s the one holding the credit card. The idea was to say: “you’re not going to stop consuming”, that’s not the aim. It’s just “it’s possible for you to consume differently, and ask yourself questions.”

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First of all, there’s the idea of need. Do this exercise if you buy things online. Put the items in your basket. But don’t click “buy” straight away. Come back 24 hours later. After 24 hours, you’ll maybe have forgotten that you wanted to buy something. In the end, if you do go back, then maybe you really do need it.

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So there’s really the idea of questioning your need. If you’re talking about restraint, you have to start with that. And then maybe think: “yes, there are other ways of getting a service.” Because, in the end, a product is very often about getting a service. Your washing machine provides you with a service. It washes your clothes for you. Your electric drill provides a service. It drills a hole for you.

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But if you need to make a hole, do you really need to buy a product to do that? Or just buy a service, which would be renting a drill for the day. Or, maybe more simply, ask your neighbour if they have a drill they can lend you. It’s the same with a washing machine. Well, washing clothes is a service that you need more frequently.

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But just because the drum belt has broken, doesn’t mean you have to buy a whole new machine. So you have to ask yourself the question “can I get it repaired?”, rather than just “I’m going to buy a new washing machine.” It’s more practical, it’s less expensive, and it creates local jobs, as of course these repairs are be done in France.

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So the question is, “Is it better to use repair services that create local jobs rather than manufacturing services that create jobs in China?” So for me, as the person behind this communication campaign, obviously I have a very positive opinion about the campaign. On the one hand, because we managed to send a message around restraint, without actually using the word “restraint”.

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But in fact it's really about that. I think it's a rather excellent virtue, showing that we can't get out of our environmental problems without changing our model. In the end, the public debate sparked off by this campaign was pretty unprecedented. Because if you look at the history of brands, there are several international brands that had already positioned themselves, ten years ago, as “Don't buy our products. Unless you really need them. Don't take part in Black Friday.”

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In fact various brands have already positioned themselves like that. Brands like Patagonia, environmentally engaged brands, but who also have a business model of selling products. The major difference here is that the subject was brought into the public arena by a government agency. And I think that's also what sparked a reaction, and one which wasn't necessarily properly understood by everyone. Some people saw our message as one of de-growth.

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And that's not true. It's absolutely not a message about de-growth. It's a message about alternative growth. It's a message about growth within the limits of our planet's resources. It's a message saying “Let's continue to create wealth in our country, but let's do it intelligently”.

Musical interlude

Currently, as you can see, our goal is to guide our society towards something that's sustainable. In the sense of not exceeding, or stopping exceeding the limits of our planet.

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The limits of our planet being, amongst other things, climate change, as well as resource consumption. To achieve this respect for planetary limits, in the end we need efficiency. So that's what you often see: energy efficiency, consuming less energy. Recycling is also part of material efficiency, but most of all it's about restraint. And so we also questioned French people to find out where they stand in terms of this idea of restraint.

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It's rather interesting, and ultimately pretty revealing of our own paradoxes. When we ask the question, 83 percent think that in France in general, people tend to lend too much importance to material consumption. And so you might say: excellent, it's all good, we've come a long way, we've won, we're going to stop consuming, at least in the way we consume today. But when you dig a bit deeper, in the end, one quarter of the French population, only one quarter, actually admits to its own contribution to the problem. In

other words: “we all consume too much, but it’s not me, it’s other people”. And so that’s something of a brake on taking action, which you can begin to see taking shape. Because in the end, 82 percent of the population think that they already have a restrained lifestyle, and they don’t feel that they’re overdoing things in any way.

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And so in the end, on the issue of people’s consumption, in terms of the extent of the environmental problem, there’s still some way to go. And so this is when you realise there’s a paradox, that we still need to make an effort to be restrained - because in the end, if we all think that people consume too many things, but at the same time think of ourselves as restrained, then something’s not working.

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What’s also interesting in this survey is that one in two French people thinks that the government and large companies are actually acting to limit environmental impacts. So that’s pretty interesting. But 44 percent say that large companies aren’t working at all to limit the impact of their activities. So in fact people are largely placing the burden onto companies to make efforts.

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We can also see that three quarters of French people think that public policies should give priority to environmental protection over economic growth. Notably by controlling economic activities and marketing. And marketing certainly has a huge role to play in changing behaviour, and in the narrative and image we have of what society should be.

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72 percent of French people think that the government should do more to protect the environment. Even if that means controlling or limiting certain practices. Here again, the intention is there. But then we’ll have to see how people feel when they see more taxes, for example on plane travel, or limiting the use of internal combustion vehicles.

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And finally, for 90 percent of French people, and I think this nicely concludes the subject of repairs, believe that “manufacturing standards should promote more durable products, that are easily repairable, even if that comes at the detriment of price”. And here we’re touching on an essential element in consumption, because if we want more sustainable products, then we have to accept that they’re also more expensive products.

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That perhaps means accepting, like in the old days, having more expensive products, that cost half a month’s wages, as it used to be. So that makes me sound a bit old-fashioned, but there was a time when a television set cost a whole month’s salary. The same for a washing machine. Whereas today they only cost a few hundred euros. And as a result, the quality can’t be the same as those older products, which were very well designed, and might use a little more material during their manufacture, but then they would last much longer.

Musical interlude

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You realise that there are a multitude of ways of consuming differently. And so the challenge is to consume differently, and not to have consumption patterns imposed on us by companies, by marketing. And they'll no doubt be very good at selling a dream. But in the end it's a short-term dream. The idea is rather to have consumption that's responsible and sustainable.