Special Stop IV: A Village Made of Trash

Last year, the international annual conference of the Climate Alliance took place in Luxembourg. There, we had the opportunity to learn about BENU VILLAGE, an eco-village in southern Luxembourg that won the 2021 Municipal Climate Protection Award 'Climate Star.' Luxembourg is one of the smallest countries in Europe, with roughly the same population as Frankfurt am Main.

Moien aus Lëtzebuerg (Hello from Luxembourg)! Today, we're taking you to a village made out of waste. It is located in the small town of Esch-sur-Alzette on the border with France. It has been growing since 2019. It all started with the idea of constructing a building from old shipping containers that were no longer allowed to be used at sea, and insulating them with natural materials. In the meantime, an entire eco-village has emerged from leftover materials from other construction projects. By the way, the word 'BENU' is pronounced like the English phrase 'Be New!' and also means 'Be New!'

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Have you ever heard of an eco-village? If not, we'd be happy to explain it to you. The word "eco" comes from "ecological" and describes the connection between us as humans and nature. All projects in the eco-village focus on a circular economy. This means that materials and things are used, repaired, reused, and upcycled for as long as possible. This helps conserve natural resources and the environment. In the workshops, they avoid environmentally harmful materials like plastic or silicone.

The people working in the BENU Village always come up with new ideas. For instance, they've created art pieces from trash that you can admire on the facades. There's also a workshop that crafts beautiful furniture from waste and old furniture, and a restaurant where they cook new dishes from rescued food that would have otherwise gone to waste. In the UpCycling tailoring shop, they sew new clothes from clothing donations. If you ever want to visit the eco-village, they'll even have a hotel room for you soon!

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I agree, it's amazing what beautiful things can be created from materials that would otherwise be considered waste. I'm also curious to see what other ideas the people at BENU Village come up with.

Äddi! (Goodbye!)

Questions and Exercises for the Extra Stopover Luxembourg

For the younger ones

- What do you do with an item when it's broken?

- Have you ever crafted something beautiful from trash? If yes, what was it?

- Why is it important for both humans and nature to have less plastic waste?
  Plastic is made from petroleum, and its production releases a lot of CO2, contributing to global warming and climate change. Additionally, much plastic waste ends up in the ocean, forming huge garbage patches. Many animals die because they either eat the plastic or get entangled in it. So, when we reduce our consumption of plastic-packaged items, it's beneficial for both us and the environment.

Exercise: Next time you're thinking about throwing something away, consider whether you could still use it. There are many ideas for repurposing old furniture, plastic packaging, food, clothing, and more.

For the older ones

- What ideas from the BENU Eco-Village could you implement in your kindergarten/school or at home?

- Do you believe that we humans are a part of nature, and nature is a part of us (coexistence)? Or do we live more separately from nature, with nature just existing around us (environment)? *Consider whether you see humans as an part of nature, with nature being interconnected with us, or if you perceive us as living separately from nature, with nature merely surrounding us. Keep in mind that there are people in the world for whom nature, like the forest, is their daily habitat. For example, many Indigenous people in the Amazon region depend on and live within the rainforest. People everywhere rely on nature for food. How we perceive ourselves as part of nature varies from country to country and from person to person .*

- What does the term "ecological sustainability" mean to you?

- Have you ever seen a Hundertwasser House? What similarities exist between it and the BENU Village?

Tip: In the teacher manual (page 40, module 38), you'll find more ideas related to the topic of "Plastic in Backpacks and Bags." Instead of throwing items away, consider placing them in a swap shelf (page 39, module 37). Learn more about the coexistence concept of Indigenous people from Peru in module 23, "In the Amazon Rainforest" (page 30).