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INTERVIEW WITH A CLIMATE COACH

“KLIMASCHUTZ GEMEINSAM WAGEN” (DARE CLIMATE CHANGE TOGETHER) IS A SUSTAINABILITY TRANSFORMATION PROJECT FROM KARLSRUHE, GERMANY, THAT AIMS TO ENGAGE CITIZENS IN A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE AND CLIMATE-PROTECTING BEHAVIOUR.

In the project, climate coaches act as intermediaries between scientists from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and the community partners and citizens. Monika Seelmann, one of the climate coaches in the research project, shared with us her role and responsibilities and her perspectives on Citizen Science.

*“I love this blue planet more than anything.”
-Monika Seelmann*



How about introducing yourself to our readers? What is your role in sustainability research projects as a Citizen Scientist?

I am Monika Seelmann, 72 years old, art therapist & climate coach. My experience in climate protection work is that many people find the topic of "CO2 savings" too abstract. I live in a district built in the middle of the forest about 60 years ago. Three years ago, 3,000 trees had to be cut down here due to the effects of climate change. That touched people and drove them. And that was my hour to realise to combine my just finished education as a climate coach (KIT) with my profession of creative design processes for self-awareness. As consciousness-raising work.

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Through the dying trees, people directly experience what climate change means. I have conceived an open-ended project: "Tears of the TREES of Hope". In the centre are the trees; they cry. But from this centre, they can also draw hope, as in my project, for example, through tree planting campaigns. Otherwise, I go with people into the forest; we create small objects from the wood of fallen trees. I just finished a year-long project with a group of students; we "planted" a future forest out of recycled material as an art object for the final project. In the fall, I start a new year group; I want to create a mindfulness path with 16 stations in the school park.

So my work is predominantly awareness and education work. My city supports the project, and I regularly exchange with the scientists of KIT/KAT (Karlsruhe Transformation Center for Sustainability and Cultural Change).

Another project I am outlining is intended as a combined photo-info event on forest fires. I would like to establish networking between a forester and wall fire researcher I know in Turkey, his son who photographs burned forests, the forest, environmental and nature conservation and the forest fire research of the KAT in my city, with the first forest fires this year. Here I see my role in networking with a wide variety of actors on a current issue, where international experiences made before us can serve and, at the same time, inform the population, which can feed into forest fire prevention, e.g. through citizen engagement.

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Do you think it is important to involve citizens in research projects as collaborators? If yes, why?

Absolutely. We recently had the MobiLab of the KAT on the topic of energy and climate on site. It brings scientific research to the people, who can situate the experience in their everyday lives and, in turn, feed it back to research with coordinated feedback. This creates a mutually beneficial cycle with a high level of efficiency.

In what ways can citizens contribute to research projects? How can they participate? What was your experience?

I have launched a networking project this year: Wald.Stadt.Klima - AktionsRaum for mindful & sustainable living. It relates to our district: Waldstadt. The forum can be "played" by different actors, experts, and citizens. This way, a flow of information and experience can be created that connects citizens and experts.

For example, we have organised the climate puzzle scientifically developed in France and allowed laypersons to experience the topic. These experiences flow back to the scientist who moderates the climate puzzle.

Another vision is a "Schwätzbänke" that I initiated at an urban gardening project I supervise. It serves the communication "about God & the world". But I also want to use this as a "Science Bench". In this way, scientists can come into an exchange with citizens formally and informally, which can fertilize both sides.





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What skills and competencies do you think citizens need to do this?

Interest in the subject, a committed desire to make a personal contribution, enjoyment of responsibility, and self-efficacy. Everything else can be accompanied.

What will citizen science's future look like in the next ten years?

When I became acquainted with the idea of "Citizen Science", I felt that my very committed but voluntary lay work, which takes place in close cooperation with scientists, was valuable and appreciated. I am excited about this concept. I think it puts citizens in their area of maturity and takes them seriously in that. "Sapere Aude" - enlightenment in action. At the same time, it appeals to social responsibility for shaping our possible futures. I see this as a promising way to motivate and support citizens interested in getting involved in a high-quality manner. That's what makes engagement fun.

To conclude: I am often asked why I am tirelessly active at 72. Because I love this blue planet more than anything. But, I also know about the vulnerability of all life. I also reckon that humankind might not make it. The following motto serves me, and in the possibility of failure, it comforts me to contribute everything at my disposal to the "Reverence for Life" (Albert Schweitzer) and "Preservation of Creation". Networking with like-minded people and knowing about the solidarity that unites everyone in these challenges is the foundation of everything I do.

Monika likes to end her interview with a quote from F. Steffensky that expresses how hope helps to find meaning in one's aspirations:

"Perhaps hope is not even the belief in the good outcome of the world and the avoidance of its destruction. No one guarantees that life on earth will not collapse in the foreseeable future. But we can pretend to hope. One also learns to hope by acting as if salvation is possible. Hope does not guarantee a good outcome. To hope is to trust that what we are doing is meaningful."

