

'Bad old habits' will survive pandemic

Academic **Dominique Desjeux** believes we will quickly fall back into our old ways once the coronavirus crisis is over. **Blyth Brentnall** explains more



NO, this crisis won't make minimalists of us all. When the pandemic comes to an end, we'll quickly fall back into our old bad habits, argues anthropologist Dominique Desjeux, who specialises in consumerist behaviour at the University of Paris.

Throughout the coronavirus lockdown, commentators in the French press have predicted this crisis will teach us valuable lessons about the limits of mass consumption, forcing us to change our behaviour.

Sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin wrote: "Confinement can help us to start detoxing our way of life."

Similarly, politician Hubert Védrine claimed in *Le Figaro* that coronavirus has challenged people's faith in consumerism. Professor Desjeux disagrees.

"After the crisis, we no longer face the same constraints as we experienced during the pandemic, so people are likely to just go back to normal," he said.

"As an anthropologist, I employ a particular method to understand culture. Working with a team of about 90 others, I try to understand people's practices first and then I look at their values afterwards."

From such research, he has learned that while people might believe certain things or hold certain values, this doesn't necessarily translate into actions.

To demonstrate, he described a study he conducted for a well-known cosmetics brand. From interviewing a focus group of about 10 women, he discovered that although they all liked the company's make-up, they were concerned about the damage this might do to their skin.

That health concern, however, did not stop them using the products.

"It's quite normal for there often to be a big gap between values and practices," he said.

Based on this disconnect between thought and reality, Prof Desjeux believes that even if our values are brought into question by the crisis, we still will not shake off old habits. "If you want to change

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**Anthropologist
Dominique Desjeux**

people's behaviour, you need strong constraints on consumption and production," he said.

"There are several types of constraints which determine practices: material, social and symbolic.

"A material constraint would be if someone has no money to buy a product. Social constraints are what you are encouraged to do or not do, based on who you are living with. Symbolic constraints are to do with how you shape your identity."

If such constraints were state-imposed, it could provoke varied reactions.

Prof Desjeux said: "For example, if we look at the *gilets jaunes* movement, you can see that the loss of purchasing power and the difficulty to consume made them unhappy and angry."

He contrasted this anger to the younger

generation in France, many of whom oppose the consumption of meat and are becoming vegetarian out of concern for the environment.

Prof Desjeux also noted that different nations would react in different ways. He drew a comparison between the French and Finnish government responses to coronavirus.

Whereas the former found it necessary to impose fines to keep the French indoors, the latter only needed to announce a lockdown for it to be effective.

Regardless of the cross-cultural differences, consumption is mounting globally and Prof Desjeux is sure of one thing: "Today we know well that it's no longer possible to continue consuming as we have done because the planet's resources are limited.

"Countries are using up more and more resources, which causes pollution, produces carbon dioxide, and, because of the scarcity of water, minerals, petrol, energy and proteins, there is an increased risk of war."

His research in China has brought him to a controversial conclusion about how to solve this problem.

"About seven years ago, for one or two weeks, China got rid of plastic bags altogether, and then they decided to invest more in green energy," he said.

"They were also the first country to produce solar power. Then, in Beijing and other big cities, there are rules on whether you can drive a car around or not. "They hold a kind of lottery system for people who want to buy a car.

"In some cities, they even use the digits in your number plate to control whether you are allowed to drive. So China is a very interesting case of minimalism."

Based on China's example, he believes that to effect real change in people's behaviour, governments might need to take authoritarian measures, imposing the constraints that are so integral to his research.

However, the Chinese government is often oppressive, challenging freedom and censoring information.

So Prof Desjeux is apprehensive about his conclusion: "Without constraints we won't be able to change our behaviour. But then again, constraints could also threaten democracy."

'If we can winter this out, we can summer anywhere'

Ireland's Ambassador to France **Patricia O'Brien** delivers a message of hope about overcoming the coronavirus challenge together



IT FEELS like a long time has passed since we were looking forward to celebrating Saint Patrick's day here in France and around the world.

March 17 came and went while we were all preoccupied with the Covid-19 crisis, but this is just one example in a long list of cancelled plans.

It seems that life beyond the essential has been on pause. The Taoiseach Leo Varadkar took early and decisive measures to close crèches, schools and universities on March 12.

In Ireland, further restrictions were introduced to close bars, restaurants and non-essential shops and services. Those aged over 70 have been asked to "cocoon", a nice way of inviting the elderly to stay at home and safe. These measures will remain in Ireland until May 5.

A challenge of such magnitude reminds us that we are nothing without each other. No single person, organisation or government can defeat this virus alone, but with a spirit of cooperation, collaboration and solidarity, we will together.

A quote from Irish Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney has struck a chord with Irish people around the world: "If we can winter this one out, we can summer anywhere."

There is hope that we can pull through this time together and that the summer, real and metaphorical, is within reach. My

Embassy staff are working hard to help Irish citizens in whatever way we can.

We have been using the Embassy Twitter account (@IrEmbParis) and website (dfa.ie/france) to amplify information from French authorities as well as important information from Ireland regarding travel restrictions and the 14-day self-isolation for those planning to return to Ireland.

We have dedicated helplines at the ministry in Dublin and the Embassy in Paris to advise on travel and welfare issues for Irish citizens living in France or travelling back to Ireland.

This is an especially difficult time for those of you who are separated from your families, but we have never had so many ways to keep in touch.

The greatest strength of the Irish people is the sense of community we share with each other and friends in France.

Look after each other, look forward to good news in the coming weeks.

Useful links during the Covid-19 crisis:

citizensinformation.ie/en
www2.hse.ie/coronavirus
linkedin.com/company/embassy-of-ireland-france

Vital work has continued even as we come to terms with home working

Every month the British Ambassador to France, Ed Llewellyn, shares an insight into his role.

THE Covid-19 virus continues to have a huge impact in France, the UK, and around the world.

Supporting British citizens in France at this difficult time remains this Embassy's top priority.

We are working almost entirely remotely. I am proud of the way the Embassy and our consulates have adapted. We are continuing to answer your questions, whether on consular or business issues.

We are working to protect our citizens, remaining in constant contact with the healthcare sectors and across the business community.

Many of us, like many of you, have been juggling childcare and home schooling alongside our routines – we have been getting the hang of home-schooling in my family, often coping with conference calls at the

same time. Sometimes the two get mixed up! This is a challenging time for everyone, whether you are adapting to working from your homes, or in a job where that is not possible.

And, of course, for all of you who have had to make difficult choices about where to self-isolate, possibly separated from family and loved ones.

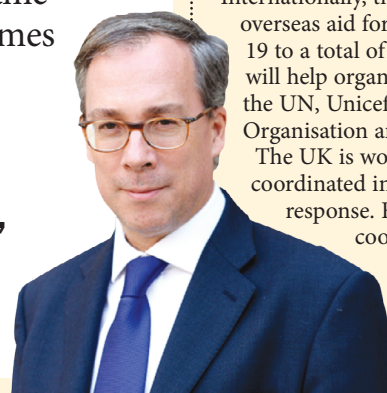
As you will have heard, President Macron has announced that the confinement measures will begin to ease from May 11. This will be a gradual process, and it will certainly not feel like an immediate return to normal.

What are we doing to help? Our Covid-19 team update our travel advice regularly and ensure ministers in London are getting the latest information about the situation in France.

We are fortunate that commercial travel options remain available at the moment, albeit much reduced, between France and the UK; it is important to stress that these are for essential travel only. The French and

Like many of you, we are getting the hang of home-schooling in my family, often coping with conference calls at the same time. Sometimes the two get mixed up!

**British
Ambassador,
Ed Llewellyn**



British governments have set out what constitutes an essential journey. Find more details at tinyurl.com/cxl7ong

The French and UK governments have announced multi-billion pound packages to businesses affected. My colleagues in the Department for International Trade continue to support British businesses here in France. There is information on our LinkedIn page (tinyurl.com/yaqtzuwc).

Internationally, the UK has raised its overseas aid for combating Covid-19 to a total of £744million. This will help organisations such as the UN, Unicef, the World Health Organisation and the Red Cross.

The UK is working to ensure a coordinated international response. Franco-British cooperation is at work in research efforts on respirators and vaccines.

One feature of this crisis is how

– despite the fact we remain socially distanced – it is bringing communities closer in our deep appreciation of the role key workers, on both sides of the Channel, are playing in keeping daily life going and keeping us safe.

Our amazing health workers are putting their lives on the line every day, but also all those, in France and the UK, who are collecting the rubbish and stacking the supermarket shelves, as well as the military and the emergency services. A massive thank you to all for all they are doing.

Let me close by sending my very best wishes to you and your family. Please continue to follow NHS and French government guidance to protect yourselves from Covid-19, for example by staying home unless absolutely necessary and washing your hands thoroughly and regularly.

Follow us on social media (@BritishinFrance @UKinFrance @EdLlewellynFCO) for updates on all the different attestations.