

Rendezvous at a windy corner / Johannes-Harm Hovinga

#studyandexperiment

River Rhine, field trip.

A journey along a changing river

The River Rhine, spanning over 1,200 kilometers from the North Sea to its source in the Swiss Alps, is not only a geological and cultural landmark but also a testament to the complex interplay between humans and the environment. Walking the entire length of the Rhine presents an extraordinary opportunity to witness firsthand the influences of a changing climate on a personal scale, while also confronting the issue of litter that accumulates along its course.

Walking along the Rhine offers a unique perspective on the impacts of a changing climate. Walking is the best way to be present in today's world, to perceive what we often pass too quickly, the human dimension in experiences.

In the summer of 2021 I walked the complete 1233 Km length of the river Rhine and daily picked up litter along my path.

An environmental walk to inform myself about pollution, loss of biodiversity and the impact of a changing climate on personal scale. The overall goal was to learn and to experience the reality of today, to be better informed about the perspectives of tomorrow.

As I walked along the Rhine I experienced the changing landscapes, passed industrial areas, discovering fairytale castles and nature in all its diversity.

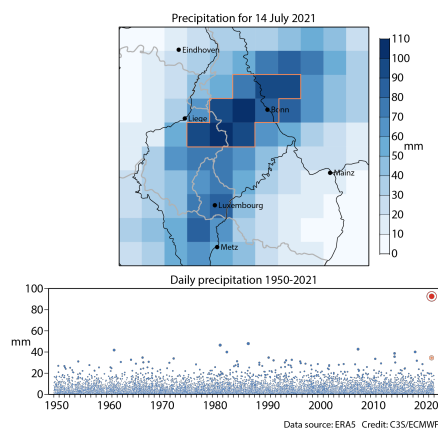
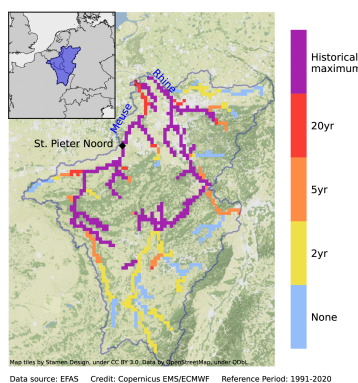
This walk brought me many insights along the way and also experienced the symptoms of a changing climate in the extremes in weather. The extremes were manifested by extreme rainfall in the area.

(On 14 and 15 July 2021, extreme weather affected parts of Germany, Belgium and surrounding countries, causing more than 200 fatalities and widespread damage.

With at least 184 deaths in Germany the floods are the deadliest natural disaster in Germany since 1962.

The extreme amounts that fell on July 13 and July 14 July fell on saturated ground which rapidly led to a significant increase in river runoff and resultant flooding.

The changing climate leads to more and frequent extreme weather phenomena. Research and analysis are needed to understand the role of a changing climate did play in the floods.)





The changing climate manifests in various ways throughout the river's course. As one traverses the river from its mouth, the rising sea levels, what are going to cause increased salinity in the estuary and altering the delicate balance of the ecosystem. Further inland, one encounters altered rainfall patterns, leading to more frequent and intense flooding events or droughts.

On a personal scale, the journey along the Rhine provides an opportunity to experience the immediate consequences of these climate-induced changes. Walking through affected areas, conversing with local communities, and witnessing how to adapt to the evolving conditions offer an intimate understanding of the challenges posed by a changing climate. It reinforces the urgency to address climate change on a global level while emphasizing the need for local actions to build resilience and mitigate the impacts.



Litter along the Rhine, an environmental challenge

In parallel to the climate impacts, the issue of litter emerges as a stark reality during the walk along the Rhine. As the river traverses urban areas and passes through densely populated regions, it becomes a repository for human waste and discarded debris. Plastics, packaging materials, and other non-biodegradable items accumulate along the riverbanks, detracting from the natural beauty of the landscape and posing significant threats to the ecosystem.

For me the daily picking up litter was crucial and became an integral part of the journey. Engaging in regular clean-up activities while walking allows for a firsthand understanding of the magnitude of the problem. It also sheds light on the interconnectedness of human actions and their consequences on the environment. The presence of litter along the Rhine underscores the urgent need for sustainable waste management, increased recycling efforts, and a shift towards a circular economy to reduce our reliance on single-use plastics.



Dreck-weg-tag Dusseldorf Rhine cleanup

The Importance of Environmental Awareness.

By immersing myself in the environment and actively participating in clean-up efforts, an intimate connection with the natural world is fostered.

This connection cultivates a sense of responsibility and empowers to become an advocate for change.

Walking the full length of the river Rhine presented an opportunity to engage with local communities, environmental organizations, and policymakers, about climate change, litter, the loss of biodiversity, and to encourage dialogue, inspire behavioral change, and promote collective action towards environmental sustainability.

By taking the experiences, stories, and lessons learned from the expedition, the ripple effect of awareness extends beyond the river's course by propagating it on different levels in work.

