

TITLE: NO IMPACT MAN

DIRECTOR: Laura Gabbert and Justin Schein

ACTOR: Colin Beavan and Michelle Conlin

GENRE: Documentary

YEAR: 2009

DURATION: 1hr 33min

SUMMARY:

The "documentary" tells the Beavans' life. This family lives in New York and decides to abandon the lifestyle of high consumption to try to live at "zero environmental impact" for a year.

No Impact Man Colin Beavan is married to Michelle Conlin, a reporter for Business Week, and their daughter for 18 months. The family decides to begin a process of sustainable life minimizing waste (and wasting less resources) as possible.

In the first period the Beavans decide to abolish the use of the car and replace it with a bicycle or a scooter to get around the city and do not use the lift to reach the apartment on the ninth floor. It is absolutely forbidden to buy products imported and shopping should be made strictly on the local market by buying organic products. Colin decides to create a compost at home by putting worms in a wooden box where they throw all the wet, organic waste (decomposes) and then he shares with farmers the humus produced.

Michelle is initially disoriented and frightened by this new lifestyle. She is sceptical because she believes that we cannot mitigate the environmental impact by changing the lifestyle at family level. She thinks that it is a collective problem. Her husband tries to make her understand that what they are doing is something positive for their daughter (who is excited from the beginning of this change), for her future and they are an example for everybody.

This new life is very difficult, especially for the relations with other people; work colleagues, friends and neighbours in particular, because they have some prejudices about Colin and Michelle. They consider them "dirty", having worms in the house because they do not wash and follow themselves a completely anomalous lifestyle.

Saving means that the family have to give up all the "vices" for example the holidays: unlike every year, they decide to go to a farm in the countryside, where they can better appreciate the nature of being in contact with animals, taking walks through the fields and eating only dairy products.

The story continues and the next aim for the family is to be able to live without electricity and to say "goodbye" to light; the Beavan organize a party with friends and they switch off the button of the electric meter: from now on their source of light and heat be sunlight and beeswax purchased in the city market. The lack of light creates new problems: Colin gets to keep the food from a bowl of iron used as a fridge or he does the laundry in the bathtub by pressing the dresses like grapes.

After a year and six months without electricity the family realizes that the sacrifice made changes them for the better: they know they have done something good for the environment and they have learned to survive without all that they were used to have (television, cars) and consume (electricity, high production of waste, etc.)

PERSONAL COMMENT:

I really enjoyed the documentary, despite the difficulty of having to quickly read the subtitles in Italian to closely follow the story, in particular it made me think that now. It is time for us to reflect on our attitudes and daily decisions on policies litter national or global. After the documentary there was a debate among us viewers about our impression on the documentary: some of us claimed that it is impossible to implement a similar project in our society of luxury and waste, while others seemed excited, but not surprised by what we had seen to believe that it could be likely to adopt a lifestyle like the Beavans'.

I agreed with the second group mentioned, even though I understand it is really the little things that we might start to improve to make the impact of the man on the environment less intrusive, but optimism, however, is challenged by the companies now that are not careful to these problems, or rather perceive them only when they are reported on television or in newspapers and this attitude of indifference prevails.

It's impossible for modern society, used to produce huge quantities of waste, to drastically change the lifestyle such as the Beavans.

I think we should take small steps starting from everyday life (implied not drastically): a school could differentiate the waste; when we walk down the street we could avoid throwing cigarette butts on the ground, launch papers or any refusal out of the car window because we are too lazy to throw them in the bins; it would be appropriate to separate our waste at home, try to reuse containers and cans before throwing them, try to limit the careless use of water, electricity and heating. In my opinion these small actions could alleviate the "damage" caused to our planet.