

Auf Wiedersehen to plastic at Berlin's no-packaging store

September 22 2014, by Yannick Pasquet



Founders of the 'Original Unverpackt OU' ('originally unpacked') shop, Milena Glimbovski (front) and Sara Wolf pose for a photo during a press preview, in Berlin, on September 11, 2014

Clutching their preserve jars, Tupperware boxes and cloth shopping bags, Berliners can now buy their groceries package-free in a "precycling" first for the environmentally switched-on city.

From ground Colombian coffee, to olive oil from Greece, biscuit

wrappers and ready-made meal trays, the layers of packaging that consumers usually have to get through—and dispose of—are a thing of the past at "Original Unverpackt" (Originally Unpackaged).

Two German women fed up with a packaging "overdose" founded the store, which opened its doors in the cosmopolitan Kreuzberg district last week.

"It was important to act and to be part of the solution instead of just getting worked up about the predicted end of the world," one of the co-founders Milena Glimbovski, 24, said.

Shoppers can buy muesli, rice or pasta by directly helping themselves from the large store containers to fill their own receptacles before getting it weighed at the cash till.

For beer and red wine, it's the same thing —'bring-your-own' bottles are just fine, while vodka is even stored in a big demijohn from which customers can buy a few shots, or more.

The shop also sells washing up liquid and toiletries in bulk, with shoppers helping themselves to grease-busting shampoo using the tap on the 10-litre (2.6-gallon) tin, while toothpaste comes in tablet form.

The shop's lay-out and decor make one almost expect an old-fashioned storekeeper in a striped apron with a pencil behind his ear to appear.



A visitor walks past a shelf with herbs in glass containers, at the 'Original Unverpackt OU' ('originally unpacked') shop, during a press preview, in Berlin, September 11, 2014

Precycling rather than recycling

But its mission is all about forward thinking, by encouraging "precycling", a preventive form of environmentalism, as opposed to just recycling already used packaging, Sara Wolf, 31, the other co-founder, said.

Germans throw away 16 million tonnes on average of rubbish a year, according to the Federal Environment Agency.

Three-quarters of the garbage found in the ocean is made up of plastic bags and packaging, as well as cigarette lighters and toothbrushes, and takes up to 400 years to disintegrate, according to environmental group WWF.

Customers seemed taken with the Berlin store.

"Our society worries far too little about the problem of plastics," complained Kathrin Puzia, a shopper in her 40s, who said she planned to get her groceries at the new shop "from time to time".

Another customer Lisa Specht said she's been buying organic aubergines out of concern for the environment but questioned the benefit when they were still packaged.

"Each one was wrapped in [plastic](#) film. Where's the ecological gain?" she asked.



Different varieties of peas are kept in glass containers, for sale at the 'Original Unverpackt OU' ('originally unpacked') shop, in Berlin, on September 11, 2014

While jumbo size is often the order of the day at big supermarkets with shoppers' trolleys full to brimming, "Original Unverpackt" allows

customers to buy far smaller quantities to avoid waste.

Valentin Thurn, a writer and director, who made the 2010 German documentary "Taste the Waste", said the food industry played on consumers' feelings to get them to buy.

"Seventy percent of our purchases are spontaneous decisions where the packaging's importance is going to have something reassuring or exciting, for example, to push us to buy," he said at the shop's launch.

The package-free Berlin shop is among a handful in Europe but the trend is still in its infancy, with two in Italy, one in Bordeaux in southwestern France and the Austrian capital, Vienna, boasting one too.

It's perhaps hard to imagine big supermarkets following suit.

Marie Delaperierre, who opened Germany's first no-packaging shop in the northern city of Kiel at the start of the year, told AFP that she believed the key was to simply meet local people's daily needs.

"This concept must remain a small neighbourhood shop to fulfill daily needs, such as 'I need 150 grammes of maize to make some popcorn'," she said.

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Citation: Auf Wiedersehen to plastic at Berlin's no-packaging store (2014, September 22)
retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2014-09-auf-wiedersehen-plastic-berlin-no-packaging.html>

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