

“Small Measures”

Whilst there is a lot of truth in the saying “the World is a small place”, with news reaching all corners of the world in an instant via social media, and increasingly uniform legal duties being applied across continents, a visit to a foreign country can still highlight so many things, big and small, which are different to what we have or do back at home, and which we can learn from.

In December, members of the OAH team ventured to Germany. Whilst intending for it to be a festive break from work, as environmental lawyers we couldn't help but notice and reflect upon some small but significant steps the Germans have taken towards protecting our planet and its limited resources. Steps we haven't seem taken at home.

Take, for example, the hotel we stayed at. As well as all the usual signage in bedrooms about putting towels back on the rail if new ones aren't required, as you stepped out of the lift on your floor the corridor was in complete darkness. Within a second or two, as you stepped out, the area lit up. As you stepped forward again in the direction of your room, your section of the corridor – but not the entire floor – lit up. An innovative contribution to the need to reduce the consumption of electricity we'd not previously seen elsewhere. With over a million hotels in the world the energy savings could be enormous if only a fraction of them had this technology.

Take too our trip to the Esprit Arena, where we went to watch the Race of Champions. Our initial complaints about the price of their drinks were soon retracted when we realised that the price of the first drink included the cup (made from re-cycled materials of course), and the idea was to buy refills during the evening and then return the cup to receive back the deposit. If all the arenas, sports stadiums and other venues in the UK introduced this approach, think of all the overflowing bins of plastic pint glasses and similar we could avoid sending to landfill. On an international scale the savings could be huge.

As we returned to Dusseldorf, having witnessed the German racing team taking the title of “Fastest Country” on the track, we noticed how the escalators on the tram network sit stationary until you approach them; another obvious and worthy contribution to energy conservation which could be applied on escalators around the globe.

Why aren't more countries and companies adopting these small measures? They seem so simple.

As was highlighted in the recent report published by the United Nations Environment Programme, Bridging the Emissions Gap, more must be done if countries are to meet their agreement of keeping the global warming rise below 2 degrees C. The report noted amongst other things that energy efficiency improvements can deliver large benefits. It is precisely because the World is such a small place that we should have little difficulty in sharing the learning about such small steps, easily taken, that would have an immediate and beneficial impact on our planet.