

A film by Paolo Casalis

THE RESEARCHER

Why I lost my job to save 5 tons of CO₂



THE RESEACHER - Why I lost my job to save 5 tons of CO2

Original Title: IL RICERCATORE - Perché ho perso il lavoro per 5 tonnellate di CO2

A film by Paolo Casalis

Duration: 71' / Country: Italy

Year: 2024 (Release date: June 7th 2024, Cinemambiente Film Festival, Turin)

Language: Italian, English

Subtitles: Italian, English, German

Featuring: Gianluca Grimalda

Camera: Gianluca Grimalda

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Gianluca Grimalda, university researcher, is the first worker ever fired for having refused to catch a plane for environmental reasons. He did an act of civil disobedience to save 5 tons of CO2 and to raise awareness on the causes of climate change.

Was it worth it?

SYNOPSIS

“After refusing to fly, climate researcher loses his job.”

Below the New York Times headline is a selfie of a 50-year-old man aboard a pirogue plying the tropical sea, his intellectual goggles contrasting with his Indiana Jones hat.

By the time the news detonates globally from the pages of The Guardian and The New York Times on Oct. 13, 2023, Prof. Gianluca Grimalda, an environmental researcher at Kiel University, Germany, has been involved in filming for “The Researcher” for a year.

Six months earlier, Grimalda had traveled for 40 days to reach Papua New Guinea, the site of his research, filming the 23,000 kilometers he traveled and the dozens of trains, buses, trucks, cabs, ferries and cargo ships that, emitting ten times less than a single, comfortable air trip, made him save 3.5 tons of CO2.

And when, after six months of research in the remotest villages of New Guinea, the University intimates that he must return to his professorship within five days (i.e., by implication, get on a plane) he says no, becoming the first worker fired for refusing to fly.

An environmental activist and member of Scientist Rebellion, Grimalda gave up everything - an enviable career and salary, a girlfriend, family affections, and a job he loved beyond everything else - to raise the alarm about the now desperate condition of the planet, to provide an example and, perhaps, a possible way out.

In this film of travel, of adventures, of individual moral principles and universal crisis, there is undoubtedly something crazy.

Whether it is the story of “The Researcher”, or the everyday behavior of its viewers, it remains to be determined.



LINKS

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/918932602>

Film Website: https://www.produzionifuorifuoco.it/portfolio_researcher.html

Streaming/ Download: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/researcher>

Press Folder: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1D7Y-cKVINetKIM-8Mz_5ll5HzysEE-mV

Press Office:  altrove@francescorasero.eu

THANKS

An infinite thanks to Gianluca Grimalda: for his enthusiastic participation in the project; for the commitment with which he learned, from scratch, how to make video footage and content, equipping himself with tools and technical knowledge; for the trust and total openness to his own most personal and intimate dimension; for the perseverance and involvement with which he made hundreds of hours of footage.

Without Gianluca's work, passion and dedication, this documentary, simply, would not have been possible.



*Married you have a sorrow, to never feel
any sweetness that is not everyone's.*

- David Maria Turollo



FILM CHARACTER: GIANLUCA GRIMALDA

Dr. Gianluca Grimalda, formerly senior researcher at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (Germany), is a social scientist interested in social cohesion and adaptation to climate change. He is also a climate activist and a member of protest group [Scientist Rebellion](#).

In February 2023 he started a low-carbon travel to Bougainville, an autonomous province of Papua New Guinea, to study the impact of market integration and climate change on social cohesion. To journey the 14,038 miles from Kiel to Bougainville, he took five trains, nine buses, two ferries, two taxis, one shared car, one police convoy and, when there were no other options, two flights. Dr. Grimalda did this out of concern for the climate, wanting to generate as few planet-heating emissions as possible, even though the whole trip took 35 days.



The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter post from the user 'gianluca grimalda' (@GGrimalda). The text of the tweet reads: "My #SlowTravel from Germany 🇩🇪 to PNG 🇵🇬 for fieldwork research has started. I plan to travel 39,000km on land and sea rather than ✈️ to reduce my carbon footprint. My trip will reduce CO2 by 6,7tons compared to ✈️ -albeit still emitting 2,7tons. Here you can follow daily updates. 1/📖". Below the text is a world map with a blue line tracing a route from Germany in Europe, through the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and ending in Papua New Guinea. A small airplane icon with a sad face is placed over the flight path from PNG back to Germany.



The image shows a screenshot of a New York Times article. The headline is "After Refusing to Fly, Climate Researcher Loses His Job". The sub-headline reads: "To reduce emissions, he took five trains, nine buses, two ferries, two taxis, one shared car and one police convoy to reach a research site." Below the text are icons for "Share full article", a share icon, and a bookmark icon. At the bottom of the screenshot is a photograph of Dr. Gianluca Grimalda wearing a hat and glasses, with another person visible in the background near a body of water.

Almost 7 months later, he had finished his fieldwork.

“I should be rejoiced about the conclusion of this fieldwork, instead I am enormously sad. Sad because last Friday the President of my Institute and the administrative director set me an ultimatum: I should be in Kiel next Monday or I’ll be fired. Being in Kiel on Monday means catching a plane, something they know I despise. Travelling by plane would produce around 4 tons of CO₂ – the greenhouse gas responsible for global warming. In my outbound journey, I limited my emission to 2 tons by travelling overland and sea for 35 days over 16,000 of the 22,000 km. In my inbound journey I plan to cover the entire distance without catching a plane, which would limit CO₂ emissions to 400kg – ten times less than travelling by plane.”

Grimalda had to face the hardest decision of his entire life.

“I am now faced with this dilemma. I know that most people would swallow the bitter pill and go ahead with their work – both as a professional and as an activist. My contract is under many respects fabulous. I am absolutely free to carry out the research I want – as long as it is in line with my Institute’s mission. My salary is hefty (€3,700 monthly income net of taxes) and I have



30 days of holiday per year. With this job, I have enough economic stability and spare time to pursue environmental causes.

Nevertheless, I believe that we have reached the point where this kind of instrumental rationality is no longer applicable. The most recent scientific evidence says that [we have transgressed 6 out of 9 planetary boundaries](#) and that [several ecosystems are close to collapse](#) (or likely past their point of collapse) because of temperature rise - in turn caused by greenhouse gases emissions. According to a scenario evaluation by the [Hamburg Climate Futures Outlook](#), the goal of staying below 1.5°C, which many scientists consider a natural safety boundary for our planet, as well as being embedded in the Paris agreement - is no longer attainable. The increase in temperature we are experiencing is unprecedented and, currently, out of control.”

Grimalda decided to quit his job.

“A trip by plane from Papua New Guinea to Germany produces, in 32 hours, 5.3 tonnes of CO₂ per passenger. Slow travel produces approximately 12 times less (420kg). In the current state of climate emergency, wasting 4.9 tonnes of CO₂ – about how much the average person in the world emits in one year – to expedite my return to Europe is not morally acceptable to me.”

Being stuck in Papua New Guinea for a few days, waiting for a ferry to depart from the remote Solomon Islands, Grimalda wrote a statement titled “Why I should lose my job to save 3.6 tons of CO₂” and sent it to a few newspapers.

Surprisingly, his story made it to the big news: The New York Times and The Guardian gave attention to his story, which became viral on Facebook and X.

In October 2024, he started his travel back to Milan, Italy, where his family lives.

“Many people will think that it is madness to give up their dream job to avoid taking one flight. But in the current era of climate breakdown, it is, in my opinion, insane to continue with “business as usual”, when science tells us that we are either dangerously close to or past the point of collapse for major ecosystems.”

“I know that my decision not to catch a plane will mean close to nothing for the protection of the environment. That plane will fly even if you have not boarded it, many people have already told me. This is true, but giving less money to the aviation industry may mean fewer planes in the future. In any case, all the science I know, all the evidence I see, point to the fact that we are in emergency. In emergency, extraordinary actions should be taken.

It is my act of love to the current and future generations, to the animal species under threat of extinction, to the idea of humanity that I instinctively and undeservedly abide by.

Some time ago I read some lines by David Maria Turollo.

“*Married you have a sorrow, to never feel any sweetness that is not everyone's*”.

HOW I MET GIANLUCA GRIMALDA AND WHY I MADE THIS FILM

by Paolo Casalis, film director

I firstly heard of Gianluca Grimalda at the end of 2023, while listening to a private Italian radio: the speaker was teasing him about the “extreme” duration - at least 35 days - of his planned journey from Germany to Papua New Guinea, made up of dozens of trains, ferries and buses. I was fascinated by this quiet, and yet determined, scientist, by his ability to stand up to provocation and insults and I started to visualize a potential story, a documentary.

Later that day, I contacted him and received a first, positive answer.

We started to chat and to organize video calls in which I tried to pass him some rudimentary knowledge on how to make a documentary movie: how to film, how to keep the camera in your hands, what to film, why, how to capture the background audio or his own voice... I've taught filmmaking for several student classes, and Grimalda has been by far my best student: he bought a new cell phone, a gimbal and an external microphone, and started to practice with these tools and an infinite perseverance.

When he started to travel, he had already turned in a willing, though beginner, filmmaker. His first shots were insecure and a bit shaky, his voice was trembling and unable to make any kind of synthesis. But he was determined, he did at least an hour of shooting for each day of travel, from the easiest European train travel to the hardest ride on a Pakistan Police pick-up in the nowhere of Balochistan.

During the 35 days of his inbound travel to Papua New Guinea, our contacts were occasional: we chatted a few times (mainly using WhatsApp vocals) and whenever he was able to find a good internet connection, he sent me his shootings. Only a few times I tried to give him tips on how to shoot, or what to film, since his progress was already remarkable, day by day: his images became more fluid, his content more lively, the dialogues he captured were shorter and tighter. By the time of his arrival in Papua New Guinea, the activist and researcher Gianluca Grimalda was also an expert camera operator.

Luckily, because from that moment we lost almost any connection: internet doesn't work that well, in the Solomon Islands, so it was impossible for him to upload GBs of material.

The research lasted 6 months, 6 months of adventures and vicissitudes I would have seen later, the most important and painful of which was the breakup of the relationship with his girlfriend.





When the research was close to the end, I had a good story in my hands - or better, I presumed to have a good story, because I hadn't seen Gianluca's last months of shootings - but the "best" was yet to come.

At the beginning of October, the IfW (Kiel Institute for the World Economy) asked him to come back fast, that meant one thing only: catching a plane.

Grimalda refused, and his refusal made it to the columns of the New York Times and The Guardian. His story became viral, meaning that he gained hundreds of haters, but also thousands of supporters from all over the World.

During his last days in the Solomon Islands, I proposed a new "technique" to record the huge amount of emotions, of data, of thoughts coming from everything that was happening around Gianluca: focusing on the audio, recording - any single day - a few minutes speech.

It worked: without the "distraction" of the video, I was able to archive his sentiments, hopes, disappointment, rage... a full spectrum of emotions that were changing day after day.

I finally met Gianluca on December 27th, he had come back for Christmas, just in time not to disappoint his beloved parents.

He was starting a new life: without a job, without money, but yet - surprisingly - calm and full of hope. On my side, I had a full hard disk of videos (some 300 hours of raw footage), WhatsApp messages, pictures, and I was determined to tell his story in the best possible way.

Three months later, "The Researcher" was done.

PAOLO CASALIS, DIRECTOR

Paolo Casalis - director/author (Bra, Piedmont, 1976)

In 2021 he realizes “Food Rebels”, awarded with Premio Eusalp at Trento Film Festival. In 2020 he’s the director of “I stay home”, the first documentary in the world on the lockdown for Covid-19 pandemic. In 2014 he produced and realized “Barolo Boys”. The film won the “DOC Wine Travel Food Prize 2014” as best Italian documentary on Food and Wine, and the “Most Film Festival” in Spain. Distributed by Netflix, Itunes, RaiTV and screened in over 150 cinema theatres, Barolo Boys is a case-study for wine-movies and for low-dudget film productions.

In 2010 he produced and made the documentary film “Langhe Doc”, official selection at the David di Donatello 2012, winner of the Valsusa Filmfest and the Sardinian Sustainability Film Festival. In 2009, with Stefano Scarafia, he made “The runner”, award-winning documentary on the world of Ultra-Trail. The film has been distributed in 15 countries and purchased by Rai (Italian main TV channel) and Sky. In the same year he shot Terra Madre, a contribution to the homonymous film by Ermanno Olmi, which was presented at the Berlin Film Festival.

Filmography

The Preacher

(doc, 52', 2024), director & producer
Glocal Film Festival, Torino

Food Rebels

(doc, 53', 2021), director & producer
Winner Premio EUSALP, Trento Film Festival 2022
Cinemambiente 2022
Bolzano Film Festival Bozen 2022
Sorrento Film and Food Festival 2023
Clorofilla Film Festival 2023
International Nature and Environmental Protection Festival, Budapest
Travel Fest Albania
Nuovi Mondi Mountain Film Festival
Wildlife Vaasa Festival-International Nature Film Festival
Cefalù Film Festival
Meihodo International Youth Visual Media Festival (Tokio, New York)
Inheritance Film Festival, Northern Ireland

Wine Roads

(doc, 60', 2021), director & producer
Los Angeles Italia Film Festival 2021
Festival del Cinema di Cefalù 2021
International Tourism Film Festival 2021, South Africa

I stay home. Diary of a quarantine

(doc, 51' - 2020), director & producer
Winner of Ojo Movil Film Festival, Peru, the International Film Festival of films made with mobile devices.
The Lift-Off Sessions
Cinema Lab V2.0
Flickfair, Los Angeles

Not Just Football

(doc, 70' - 2018), director & producer

DocsMX - Mexico City

Global Migration Film Festival

MyART Festival

Tercer Tiempo - Festival Mundial de Cine Fútbolero, Colombia

11MM Film Festival, Berlin

Arcosanti Film Festival

SHOOT Festival, Copenhagen

Helios Film Festival

Nice Côte d'Azur International FICTS Festival du Cinéma Sportif 2020

48 Hairpin Bends by Night

(doc, 53' - 2017), director & producer

Grand Jury Prize, Ciclismo Classico Film Festival, (USA)

Rueda Film Festival 2017, Barcelona

12th International Cycling Film Festival 2017

Bicycle Film Festival 2017, New York (USA)

Matera Sport Film Festival 2017

Sestriere Film Festival

Bike Days – Bicycle Film Festival, Wroclaw (Poland)

Llanberis Adventure & Mountain Film Festival, Llanberis (Galles)

Piemonte Movie Glocal Film Festival, Turin (Italy)

Filmmaker DAY, Turin (Italy)

Barolo Boys. The Story of a Revolution

(doc, 64' - 2014), co-director with Tiziano Gaia

Winner of DOC Wine Travel Food Prize 2014

Winner Most Film Festival, Spain

Vancouver Film Festival 2015,

Wine Country Film Festival 2014,

Kinookus Festival, Croatia

Bifed Festival, Bozcaada, Turkey

Harare, Zimbabwe International Film Festival

Valladolid International Film Festival, 2015

Festival de Cine de Paracho, Mexico 2015

Food Film Fest, Bergamo 2015

Viva Festival Sarajevo 2015

Italian Contemporary Film Festival, Toronto Canada 2015

Euganea Film Festival 2015

Lake Como Film Festival 2015

Feast Food & Film Victoria, Canada 2015

Festival Internacional de Cinema Documental, Rios - Portugal, 2015

Piemonte Movie Glocal Film Festival, 2015

Overlook Festival, Rome, 2014

Corto e Fieno Festival, 2014

Supported by Film Commission Torino Piemonte, Eataly Media

Vento. Italy by bike along the river Po

(doc, 50' - 2014), co-directed with Pino Pace, Stefano Scarafia

COFFI - Italian Film & Art Festival, Berlino 2015

Moffe Film Festival 2015

Document.Art - Bucarest, 2014
Life After Oil International Film Festival, 2014
Detour Festival Internazionale del Cinema di Viaggio 2014
Cherasco Movie, 2014

The Last Kilometer

(doc, 52' - 2012), director
International Moscow Sport Film Festival, 2013
Bicycle Film Festival New York, Milan, Madrid, Sacramento, Chicago, Lisboa, Helsinki
Palermo Sport film Festival
Piemonte Movie Glocal Film Festival, Turin (Italy)

Langhe Doc

(doc, 52' - 2011), director
Official Selection For David di Donatello 2012
Winner Of Valsusa Filmfest 2011
Winner Of Sardinian Sustainability Film Festival
Special Mention At Festival Delle Terre 2011
Prize Of The Public Corto E Fieno 2012
Official Selection For:
Mefest 2013, Serbia
Docaviv Festival, Tel Aviv
Focus Italia In Uruguay
Kinookus (Croatia)
Jahorina Festival, Bosnia
Tutti Nello Stesso Piatto Festival
Scanno Natura Doc
Euganea Film Festival
Epizephiry Film Festival
The Village Doc Festival Milano
Terra Di Tutti Film Festival Bologna
Moffe Film Festival 2013
Rendez-Vous Du Cinéma Italien”, Montreal, Canada;
Terra Madre
Premio Expo 2015
Sguardi Altrove Festival
Cinemambiente 2009 Torino
Slow Food On Film 2009, Bologna
Piemonte Movie 2010
Aniene Film Festival

The Runner

(doc, 52' - 2009), co-director with Stefano Scarafia
Mention d'Honneur 2010 at FICTS Festival 2010, Milan - International Festival Sport Movies & TV
Official Selection - Trento Film Festival 2011
Official Selection - Festival BCNSFF - Barcelona Ficts Festival
Official Selection - Festival Piemonte Movie
Official Selection - Marcarolo Film Festival
Official Selection - Festival Cherasco Movie



Illustration: NNZ

*If you're going to try, go all the way.
Otherwise, don't even start.
This could mean losing girlfriends, wives,
relatives and maybe even your mind.
It could mean not eating for three or four days.
It could mean freezing on a park bench.
It could mean jail. It could mean derision.
It could mean mockery, isolation.
Isolation is the gift.
All the others are a test of your endurance,
of how much you really want to do it.
And, you'll do it, despite rejection and the worst odds. And it will
be better than anything else you can imagine.
If you're going to try, go all the way.
There is no other feeling like that.
You will be alone with the gods,
and the nights will flame with fire.
You will ride life straight to perfect laughter.
It's the only good fight there is.*

- Charles Bukowski

What matters most is how well you walk through the fire

