

Panel 5.1**Behavioural change:
Models for sustainable consumption and production**

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Rapporteur: Julia Nordmann (WI)
Speakers: Birgit Munck-Kampmann (ETC/SCP)
Sirintornthep Towprayoon (KMUTT)
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Overview

Numerous research and policy reports show that the present patterns of production and consumption in the industrialised world are not sustainable. An ever-increasing energy and resource consumption will disturb the Earth's sensitive biological eco-systems. According to recent calculations with an 'ecological footprint' approach, humanity is already using more bio-capacity than our planet can provide us with in the long run. These facts lead to the conclusion that if the next generations in poor and rich countries should really have a chance for a decent and safe life on this planet, we have to radically dematerialise and decarbonise our production and consumption.

In order to significantly reduce our environmental impact and minimise climate change as much as possible (keeping global warming to a maximum of 2°C), a worldwide generation of economic welfare must be achieved by 2050 with an ecological footprint of 1.8 ha per capita (today 2.2 ha per capita), reduced resource use in developed countries by factor 10, and global CO₂ emissions must not exceed 2.5 tons per year and person (world average). What we need for 2050 is a credible, ecologically-sustainable scenario of continually growing incomes for a world of nine billion people. Transition towards more sustainable, low-carbon consumption is one of the crucial points for sustainable development in the future.

Major findings**Birgit Munck-Kampmann, ETC/SCP**

The first presentation of panel 5.1 was made by Birgit Munck-Kampmann, titled "Can sustainable lifestyles 'trickle up'?". According to this, it is not easy being green due to society surrounding each individual as many types of 'green behaviour' are not considered as 'normal'. People often find it difficult to live a sustainable lifestyle as they find themselves going against mainstream values, norms, and institutions. People behaving in a way that is not socially accepted get rejected by society, which is a painful experience for everyone. This is just one example of the way in which the structures and values of society significantly influence how easy or difficult it is for people to live sustainably. Therefore, we need to look at all the ways we can influence the overarching social paradigm to make it easier for people to adopt sustainable lifestyles - thus we have to push the social paradigm in the right (=sustainable) direction.

Not all parts of sustainable lifestyles are, however, socially unaccepted. Some sustainable behaviour is already widely promoted and accepted, such as recycling or reducing your personal household energy consumption. This is promising but on the other hand, research shows that it can lead to some sort of motivational rebound effect – people feel they have "done their bit", for example by recycling, using this to justify other behaviour which they know are damaging the environment.

One of the central questions is how we can promote sustainable behaviours and lifestyles. Politics plays an important role in changing behaviours. An example discussed in the presentation here was the smoking ban in the UK that was implemented in 2006. In this case, a report from the UK government showed how policy interventions can both respond to changes in attitudes (towards smoking in this particular case) or values and reinforce them at the same time in order to proactively drive them further. This report concluded that “the key lesson from the smoking ban experience is identifying that when attitudes are shifting, applying political leadership combined with a transparent and open review of evidence can transform a social norm within a relative short span of time.”

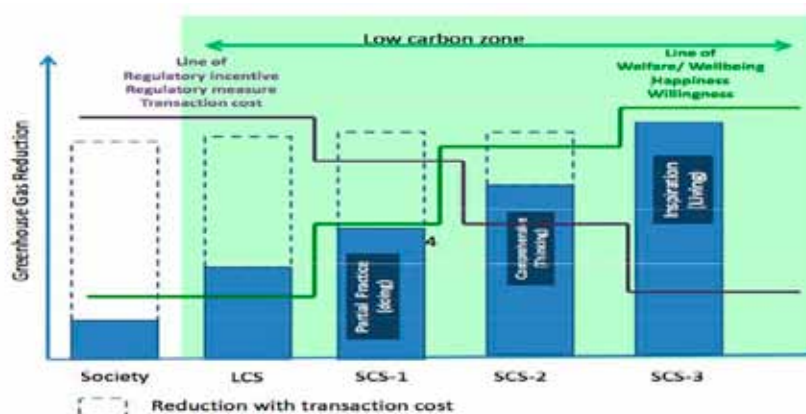
When we think of potential policies that could promote sustainable consumption, we are just as timid, fearing that they are too radical – that people will never accept the ideas or that they are impossible to implement. This example, however, shows that we should perhaps be braver and more optimistic in this respect.

- The three key points to remember:
- Public opinion can change radically and quickly
- Policy makers can play a key role in promoting and supporting positive cultural change
- Whenever we come across pioneering individuals or communities, we can think about what we can do to support them – and help them avoid the pain of social rejection.

Sirintornthep Towprayoon, KMUTT, Thailand

The second presentation “An approach to sufficiency carbon society: A case study of Thailand” was held by Sirintornthep Towprayoon. It presented, as shown in the title, a case study from Thailand on how to approach a low-carbon society. For this, the principle of a sufficiency economy was defined as balance between moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. Indicators for this economy can be defined on three levels: partial practice (doing), comprehensive (thinking), inspiration (living). The implementation of the sufficiency economy principle was shown via two case studies, one of the community sector and the other of the service sector.

A low-carbon society driven by the sufficiency approach would include community activities to conserve and restore natural resources in order to adjust people’s lifestyles in line with ecological carrying capacities. In this context, the role of happiness was discussed regarding the development towards a low-carbon society – thus a possible relation between amounts of CO₂ emissions and happiness; happiness enables people’s willingness to reduce CO₂ emissions and change their lifestyles towards a low-carbon society (see picture below, taken from ppt slide 17)



Furthermore, the presentation discussed indicators for a sufficiency carbon society, such as greenhouse gas emission from community management per unit, the number of projects on greenhouse gas emissions and people’s awareness of them, or an increasing happiness index due to technology dependence, lifestyle change

and willingness to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It concluded that driving forces for behavioural change can be different among communities and parties. Changes in behaviour as described in the two case studies were triggered by external problems people in this area encountered together with sufficiency economy implementation – this together led to changes towards a sufficiency carbon society. Furthermore, communities with sufficiency economy implementation show different mindsets of consumption through eco-thinking and routine activities in comparison to other communities where these principles are not implemented. Apart from this, the development towards a low-carbon society is not only driven by technologies but the consciousness of people for their living and its impact on the environment. Communities with sufficiency economic concerns are likely to drive towards a low-carbon society through their perception, attitude and consciousness rather than those in other areas where technology still plays the main role of mitigation. And last but not least, merging this concept of mitigation with sufficiency concerns and eco-technologies is the challenge for Thailand to drive forward low-carbon societies in the near future.

Magnus Bengtsson, IGES, Japan

The third presentation on “Transforming lifestyles and consumption patterns towards a sustainable low-carbon society” by Magnus Bengtsson started off with two perspectives on sustainable consumption: consumption of resources (environmental sustainability) and consumption of products/services (economic and social sustainability). The most common approach to sustainable consumption focuses on the buying decisions made by individual consumers, however, this role of the consumer as decision-maker is overstated as consumers’ choices are limited to what producers are offering and prices do not reflect the life-cycle environmental impacts of products / services. Furthermore, consumers are influenced by society and feel strong expectations from peer groups, family, friends, etc. to consume certain types and amounts of products / services. Consumption is a form of self-expression, a group identity signal, and a social status marker. Such social pressure to consume is amplified by advertising and by political initiatives to expand the economy. Apart from that, consumer choice is often habitual and not well reflected or rational. The picture below shows the major factors influencing consumer behaviour:



Thus, consumption patterns are supported and constrained by complex socio-technical systems and radical transformation of consumption patterns require modification of the system as a whole, not just parts of it. For this, consumers, however, have only limited possibility to bring about system changes. Therefore, we should look at consumption as part of people’s lifestyles instead of focussing narrowly on consumption. For this, it is important to understand the role of consumption in different lifestyles.

Regarding politics, lifestyles and consumption patterns are not solely influenced by a small number of policy areas but all major policy areas have a certain impact on them. Therefore, only add-on environmental policies

are insufficient for enabling sustainable consumption patterns. The necessary transition towards sustainable consumption will not happen unless major policies are redesigned. Policy measures need to be broad-based and involve policies of several different ministries; such actions require collective decisions based on democratic deliberation.

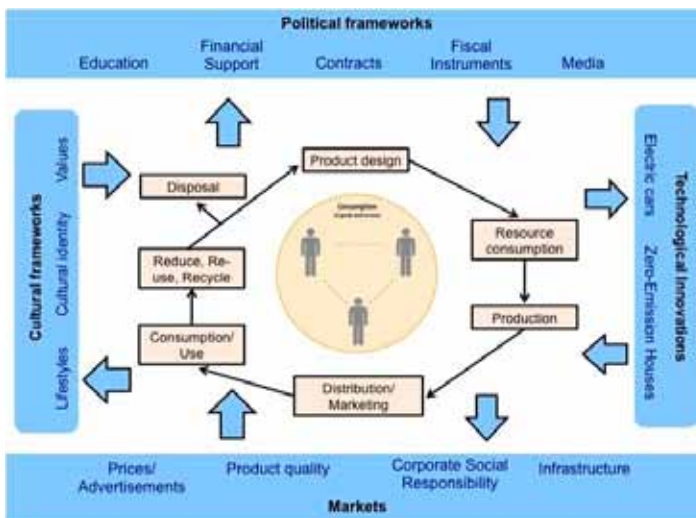
Maria Jolanta Welfens, WI, Germany

The last presentation of panel 5.1 focussed on the question “Towards sustainable lifestyles – How to bend the trend from unsustainable reality towards sustainable lifestyles?” by Jola Welfens. Starting off with a picture of our unsustainable world nowadays, it showed that present patterns of production and consumption in the industrialised world are not sustainable. An ever-increasing energy and resource consumption will disturb the Earth’s sensitive biological eco-systems.

The lifestyle enjoyed mostly by the Western industrial societies in the twentieth century will increasingly become the global standard in the twenty-first century. Not only per capita consumption but also the number of consumers is on the rise – due to population growth as well as the worldwide expansion of the ‘global consumer class.’

Therefore, ambitious sustainable low-carbon development targets for 2050 are needed in order to significantly reduce our environmental impact and minimise climate change as much as possible (keeping global warming to a maximum of 2°C). A worldwide generation of economic welfare must be achieved by 2050 with an ecological footprint of 1.8 ha per capita (today 2.2 ha per capita), reduced resource use in developed countries by factor 10, and global CO₂ emissions must not exceed 2.5 tons per year and person (world average).

Overall, patterns of production and consumption are influenced by a variety of complex structures and frameworks that are interdependent to each other (see picture below).



Modern societies are characterised by complexity and dynamic interaction, where possible driving forces are related to many others that have an impact on each individual in the society. This is a multi-directional process with dynamic interactions between producers, consumers, governments etc. Consumers do not decide on goods and services solely based on their personal needs and desires but they are influenced by family members, friends, peer-groups and other social networks as well as opinion leaders.

Most political efforts and initiatives over the past years did not lead to the expected positive effects on the environment partially due to the fact that existing socio-cultural conditions and frameworks influencing consumer behaviour have not been considered widely enough in these strategies. However, consumer behaviour (sustainable or not) is not only a result of individual choice but also of many interactions between socio-cultural and other factors. Therefore, it is important to understand the (socio-cultural) context within which consumer choice takes

place. Key findings from scientific studies regarding consumer behaviour showed that

- Consumer behaviours are complex and non linear and can not be explained through conceptual models
- Social distinction is one of the major driving forces of consumption
- Consumption objects are symbols, consumed because of their imaginary dimension
- Life-enjoyment is a crucial element of the modern conception of a good life

Main issues discussed

Panel 5.1 was divided into two parts, both containing two presentations followed by a short discussion round. The first discussion and comments were about personal electricity consumption and the smoking ban in the UK:

Question from the floor: Do you know the volume of your monthly electricity consumption?

Reactions from the panellists:

- This is not a fair / good indicator or measurement – you have to see the whole picture including other actions towards sustainable lifestyles
- A possible incentive here for each individual: look at the bills / amount of money each month
- Also important point when talking about each others electricity consumption is the not only the amount of electricity consumed but also the provider you chose for your household
- Important overall: you need to reflect on yourself – this, however, is a painful process

Comment from the floor on smoking ban example: First, the link between tobacco consumption and lung cancer was not believed but later the scientific link became clear, which lead to a social consensus in the UK.

Reactions from the panelists:

- Politicians are not keen on standing up and implementing taxes and regulations on people so as not to violate the feeling of a free land and democracy; and
- Important: long debate about an issue and suddenly it made ‘click’ and something changed in people’s minds – why and how does this happen? If you can define this process, you are a fair bit closer to a change towards a low-carbon society.

The second discussion and comments were about environmental politics and the relation between happiness and wealth:

Comment from the floor: Policy processes are mainly driven/shaped by finance/development ministries and not environmental ministries – so it is difficult to implement sustainable consumption in governments processes and strategies. Furthermore, political systems in most countries are directed towards economic growth – increasing consumption, promoting consumption – not sufficiency.

Reactions from the panellists:

- climate change became framed as an environmental issue – this is not good because this places it in the environmental ministries, although it is an issue of saving our place to exist and thus concerns all ministries as it is a security issue
- we need to place it in the other ministries as well – make it part of their core business
- politics: CO2 reduction policies might not be accepted by society, policy makers need to listen to public voice

- we should focus on resource efficiency – not resource productivity – in a broader sense and frame sustainable consumption and production in a resource efficiency context, speaking the language of politicians

Question from the floor: Is there a correlation between happiness, wellbeing and wealth?

- up to a certain level, there is a positive correlation between happiness and wealth – after a certain point, happiness curve goes down again
- key concept: de-growth – possible in combination with development and happiness

Policy Relevant Questions

Most political efforts and initiatives over the past years did not lead to the expected positive effects on the environment. One of the reasons for this is the fact that existing socio-cultural conditions and frameworks influencing consumer behaviour have not been considered widely enough in these strategies. Therefore, the following issues are relevant for policy measures:

- The creation of sustainable low-carbon societies will require a more radical and fundamental transformation than most of us realise;
- Support for transition research for better understanding of consumer behaviour is necessary
- Different measures for different social milieus are needed;
- Support is required for scientific dialogue about growth and de-growth; and
- Change agents (pioneering individuals / communities) should be supported
- Systemic approach – whole system needs to be modified – and cross-cutting approach, both for science and politics, is required.