

## P5.1-2 Towards Sustainable Civilisation: How to Bend the Trend from Unsustainable Reality towards Sustainable Lifestyles?

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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, 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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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.

### Consumption in a changing world

Consumption patterns in industrialised countries are not sustainable from an environmental as well as social point of view. This refers to all our daily needs: mobility, clothing, housing, eating habits, and recreation. In all these areas, we are making use of ever more and ever newer goods and technical services contributing to increasing global consumption of energy and resources and related effects such as climate change, ocean acidification, and a reduction in biodiversity.

The lifestyle enjoyed mostly by the Western industrial societies in the 20th century will increasingly become the global standard in the 21st 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.'

The key impetus driving expansion of Western patterns of consumer behaviour and steadily increasing per capita consumption stems from increasing worldwide economic integration (globalisation), new communication and information technologies closely linked to this increase, and in particular marketing, advertising, and the media. The globally increasing consumption levels increase pressures on environment, especially in the regions with lower environmental and social standards. The environmental impact of European consumption takes place in overseas. The direct pressures from European production have been partially decoupled.

In sum, private consumption, especially in the industrialised countries, is a significant factor that contributes to damaging the natural biosphere and progressive climate change, that is, the vital contributions of nature to our survival, and therefore reduces the development of prosperity and economic productive capacity.

The three categories of consumption with the highest environmental impact are **food, mobility, and housing**. About 15-30% of European environmental pressures (mainly air emissions) can be allocated to the consumption of food and drink in Europe; the area mobility causes 18% of European GHG emissions and 7% of total material use for all products consumed in Europe; and housing accounts for 23%. Therefore changes in consumption patterns in these three categories are especially important for a development towards sustainable consumption. So far in none of the three, however, a trend towards more sustainable consumption patterns becomes apparent; on the contrary, they seem to develop towards increasingly

unsustainable consumption behaviour.

The impact of the intensified energy efficiency initiatives at EU and national level is not visible in the statistics for electricity consumption. This figure has grown constantly alongside GDP in the EU-27 member states and EU candidates. Many factors lead to the noted increase in electricity consumption, e.g.: increased density of household appliances, growing popularity of consumer electronics as well as information and communication technology (ICT) equipment and a decreasing number of persons per household meaning the number of electric appliances shared also drops.

### Understanding consumer behaviour

*'Understanding (mainstream) consumer behaviour is a prerequisite for understanding how to motivate or encourage pro-environmental behaviour.'*

Jackson 2005, p. 9

Consumer behaviour (sustainable or not) is not only a result of individual choice but also the result of many interactions between socio-cultural and other factors. Consumption is not primarily an individual activity but framed by many cultural and social contexts. Consumers are guided as much as by what others around them say and do, and by the 'rules of the game' as they are by personal choice. Thus, it is important to understand the (socio-cultural) context within which consumer choice takes place. Current scientific approaches offer only partial explanation of consumer behaviour. What are the key findings from scientific studies regarding consumer behaviour?:

- Consumer behaviours are complex and non linear and can not be explained through conceptual models;
  - The group of 'socio-psychic' (needs seems to have significant influence on individuals' consumption behaviour;
  - Social distinction is one of the major driving force of consumption;
  - Consumption objects are symbols, consumed because of their imaginary dimension;
  - People try to improve their social position, which implicates that they are continuously purchasing positional goods;
  - People in certain sectors or groups of the society depend on a certain set of goods;
  - Life-enjoyment became a crucial element of the modern conception of a good life; and
  - Different audiences behave differently, and require targeted and/or tailored interventions: social milieus approach.
- Lifestyles are defined by individuals or even collective identities, because people or groups identify and at the same time restrain themselves with respectively by certain patterns of lifestyles. By comparing the 'ideal sustainable lifestyle' to several existing and recognised milieu-studies in Germany, specific strategic starting points can be concluded in order to develop a sustainability strategy for particularly important societal groups / milieus. The Milieu-analysis developed by the Institute Sinus Sociovision in Heidelberg (Germany) groups people who are similar in their view and way of living. One milieu is thereby compatible with different, specific lifestyles.
- Some scientific findings show that the consumption of resources is the highest in exactly those Milieus that are supposed the leading and most open-minded ones concerning sustainability. The members of those Milieus definitely think environmentally responsibly, but consume at high level. They can act environmentally conscious in certain decisions (purchase of a specific car or house). But they can afford to buy more products and services than other social Milieus. Thus, as a result of their material status, their lifestyle is very resource-intensive despite the high environmental awareness. At the same time, their lifestyle represents a model for rather weak skilled and financially weak milieus. Globally, this group of consumers currently grows dramatically.
- The key findings regarding consumer behaviour can at least partially explain why (most) political efforts and initiatives over the last years did not lead to the expected positive effects on the environment: existing socio-cultural conditions and frameworks influencing consumer behaviour have not been considered widely enough in these strategies.
- What are the key policy implication from the research findings?:
- Identifying and acting to **remove barriers** –

- identify specific barriers to sustainable behaviour patterns; different barriers for different groups. Existing knowledge about such barriers to sustainable consumption enables us to take strategic action towards resolving these barriers;
- Making sustainable lifestyles real requires transition in the whole production and consumption system: **transition** concerning the ways of thinking and decision making of producers and consumers, creation and production of sustainable goods and services, creation of infrastructures to make sustainable consumption easy and education and communication for sustainability;
  - **Promoting new business models for sustainable consumption:** governments play an important role in supporting environmental and social responsible businesses aiming at increased value creation and consumer satisfaction (through access and use products instead of selling more and more material products); and
  - Different social groups act and think differently, thus they require differently tailored strategies and measures. Policy should recognise such diversity and the target groups should be regarded as actively involved stakeholders.