
7 Sustainable Lifestyles and Education for Sustainable Consumption

7.1 Introduction

Already in 1992, Agenda 21 called for 'new concepts of wealth and prosperity which allow higher standards of living through changed lifestyles and are less dependent on the Earth's finite resources'.⁹⁵ It paved the way for the emerging understanding that the sustainability challenge cannot be solved only by improving efficiency, but should also include behavioural changes that entail empowerment of individuals and a concerted action of all societal actors, including governments, businesses, NGO, media and education, which already effectively shape lifestyles. It requires changes at cultural, social, environmental and economic levels by using strategies that raise awareness and develop new values and visions for sustainable societies.

The purpose of this background paper is to present some of the existing knowledge on lifestyles and strategies for promoting sustainable consumption and lifestyles, including education, to identify challenges in the current efforts and to highlight future opportunities.

Defining lifestyles

Lifestyles serve as "social conversations", in which people differentiate themselves from other people, signal their social position and psychological aspirations. Since many of the signals are mediated by goods, lifestyles are closely linked to material and resource flows in the society.

"Sustainable lifestyles are patterns of action and consumption, used by people to affiliate and differentiate themselves from others, which: meet basic needs, provide a better quality of life, minimise the use of natural resources and emissions of waste and pollutants over the lifecycle, and do not jeopardise the needs of future generations".⁹⁶ Sustainable lifestyles should reflect specific cultural, natural, economic and social heritage of each society.

Sustainable consumption is related to the process of purchasing, consuming and disposing of products, while sustainable lifestyles comprise a broader set of activities and values, such as interactions and education, which include, but are not limited to material consumption.

⁹⁵ UNCED (1992). Agenda 21. The Earth Summit: the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro.

⁹⁶ CSD (2004). "Every little bit helps..." *Overcoming the challenges to researching, promoting and implementing sustainable lifestyles*. Westminster, Centre for Sustainable Development, University of Westminster: 48.

Approach on software – hardware

New sustainable consumption practices and lifestyles require integration of the ongoing efforts to consume efficiently with initiatives that shape consumer preferences and demands towards more sustainable choices and lifestyles. This includes changes in the consumers' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours - societal "software" (*all the non-material values and norms, institutions and cultures that govern our society in an informal way*), and in the societal "hardware" (*all the material basis of society: the infrastructure, technology, products and services, as well as regulatory and economic frameworks that enable or constrain consumer choice*).

Addressing only hardware, through for example eco-efficiency improvements, may lead, as been already proven in many areas, to rebound effects from changed consumer behaviour and increasing consumption levels. Alternatively, merely providing information to consumers is not sufficient in absence of enabling infrastructure and products. For example, encouraging people to reduce their car dependency without providing high quality convenient alternatives (public transport, delivery services, car sharing and rental services, good bicycle paths, etc.) will not yield the desired result. The new societal hardware and software should encourage, enable, engage and exemplify more sustainable ways of living and herewith facilitate the shift towards more sustainable lifestyles. Only then will everyone feel the ownership of the better and more sustainable world.

7.2 Current status of consumption and lifestyles

Lifestyles are intricately interwoven with and are based on past and current consumption and production patterns. What are these patterns of consumption and what are the driving forces?

Consumption patterns and lifestyles across the globe

Peoples' needs and, to some extent, aspirations are perhaps quite similar across the globe: to maintain our lives, to nourish ourselves and our children, to have access to dwelling and cloth, to be healthy and happy. However, the way we meet these needs and the resource intensity involved dramatically differ among countries.⁹⁷ In many urban cities all over the globe, energy and resource intensity of meeting our needs through material consumption are escalating steadily. It can be seen in the rising number of cars on the roads, the growing frequency and distance of leisure and business trips, the escalating ownership of household appliances and the increasing size of housing per capita.⁹⁸ Electricity consumption from space and water heating, paper consumption and the amount of waste of all categories are on the rise.⁹⁹ At the global level, between 1960 and 2000, food consumption and production increased 2,5 times, water use has doubled, and wood consumption has tripled.¹⁰⁰ These Western lifestyles of consumerism are spreading all around the world through products and services, media and trade policies. Western type

⁹⁷ MEA (2005). *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis*. Island Press, Washington, DC.: 155.

⁹⁸ WWI (2004). *State of the World 2004*. Washington, Worldwatch Institute: 273.

⁹⁹ EEA (2005). *Household consumption and the environment*. Copenhagen, European Environmental Agency: 72.

¹⁰⁰ MEA (2005). *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis*. Island Press, Washington, DC.: 155.

restaurants and coffee shops are as common on the streets of Beijing, as international brands of clothing and other products. The global consumer class is reaching 1,7 billion people, with nearly half of them living in developing economies.¹⁰¹ Goods and services previously seen as luxuries - TVs, mobile phones and cars – have now become necessities. The supply of goods from exotic locations is increasing,¹⁰² as well as the consumption of processed food and meat.¹⁰³

In the aggregate, and for most countries, changes in consumption levels in recent decades have led to substantial benefits. However, the price is paid in the form of degradation of many ecosystem services and the exacerbation of inequities and disparities between people.¹⁰⁴ In some countries satisfaction of basic needs, such as access to clean water, food and proper health services, is still an unresolved issue. In 2002, 1.1 billion people still used unsafe sources of drinking water, not having access to 20-50 litres of clean water per day to ensure their basic needs.¹⁰⁵ 14% of the world population goes hungry every day and malnutrition claims every year 10 million lives.¹⁰⁶

Drivers for consumption patterns and lifestyles

Current consumption patterns and lifestyles have been formed in centuries by our civilisation and are driven by economic forces, technological progress, political settings, environmental issues, sociological

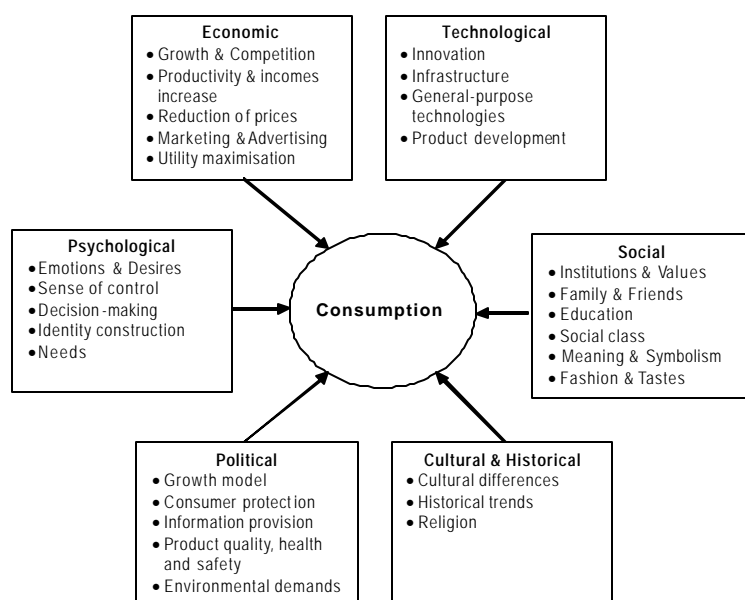


Figure 1 Drivers for consumption & lifestyles

and cultural contexts and psychological determinants (Figure 1).

Economic development leads to improved productivity that leads to reduced products prices. Incomes also increase (albeit not equally diffused), as well as purchasing power of individuals. Ideally, higher income together with the right information could lead to more sustainable purchasing choices.

Technological advances lead to supply of more efficient products and technologies (including eco-design and dematerialisation). They may, however, create new visions for lifestyles or conditions, which could stimulate people to adapt more

¹⁰¹ WWI (2004). *State of the World 2004*. Washington, Worldwatch Institute: 273.

¹⁰² Schor, J. B. (2005). "Prices and quantities: Unsustainable consumption and the global economy." *Ecological Economics* 55(3): 309-320.

¹⁰³ EEA (2005). *Household consumption and the environment*. Copenhagen, European Environmental Agency: 72.

¹⁰⁴ 20% of the world wealthiest people use 80% of resources, while 80% of the world poorest live on 20% (WWI 2004).

¹⁰⁵ UN (2006). *The 2nd UN World Water Development Report: 'Water, a shared responsibility'*. Paris, UNESCO: 601.

¹⁰⁶ FAO (2003). *The state of food insecurity in the world 2003*. Rome, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations: 40.

resource intensive lifestyles. For example, the development of air travel and aircraft technologies together with cheaper air fares, have boosted the level of international air passengers in the period 1972-1994, from 88 million to 344 million people ¹⁰⁷ At the same time, technology, e.g. information technology, offers possibilities for dematerialisation, e.g. substituting business trips with videoconferences.

Policy actions influence lifestyles through regulatory tools, e.g. bans and rules; fiscal measure, e.g. taxes, or information provision, e.g. eco-labels, affecting practices of all actors. Despite some improvements, there are still many policy actions that send confusing signals to markets and consumers. In some countries, even basic policies on health and safety are lacking.

Socio-psychological drivers include personal motives and influences of the social environment. People purchase goods and services for their qualities and functions, as much as for their symbolic value that serves as a marker of social status. Material possessions are perceived as a measure of success, power and happiness, post-material values are also emerging. Some studies indicate that the link with happiness holds true only until certain income level, after which it de-links from economic welfare and instead other factors such as availability of time, possibility to enjoy family and friends define our quality of life.

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Cultural and *historical* aspects also influence lifestyles and unspoken codes of conduct in each society. Understanding the underlying cultural and historical settings of each social group is important for realising how the visions of lifestyles can be changed, but still remain grounded on and embedded into cultural and social context.

7.3 Approaches and best practices towards sustainable lifestyles

In order to make sustainable lifestyles an easy choice, all stakeholders need to facilitate the integration of “sustainability” into existing socio-economic and value structures.

7.3.1 Examples of policy actions for sustainable lifestyles

Public authorities at all levels can facilitate the change towards sustainable lifestyles by **supporting and enabling the development of a new vision for sustainable societies** and by setting the regulatory, economic and institutional frameworks that encourage and enable sustainable lifestyles.

In many countries, policies have already been developed for greening the market by setting environmental demands on product design, use or final disposal. In the EU such policies stimulate innovation in businesses, create market for environmentally sound products and consumer demand.

Urban planning and land-use policies can enable and stimulate the development of more sustainable lifestyles. E.g., provision of parking lots at city outskirts encourages people to pool cars when they enter

¹⁰⁷ (ICAO 2007)ICAO (2007). *Homepage*, International Civil Aviation Organization.

¹⁰⁸ The World Value Survey demonstrates that until \$13,000 of annual income per person (in 1995 purchasing power parity) income and happiness tend to track well, but after this level they start delinking WVS (2006).

the city, reducing pollution and congestion on the streets. Shifting roadways from cars to bicycles and developing efficient public transportation is a successful measure in many cities, e.g. Bogotá, Colombia. Construction policies and governmental subsidies for sustainable housing, e.g. construction of passive houses or use of solar panels, are promising policy tools that help “normalise” new behaviours. Once infrastructure is in place, it becomes easier for consumers to change their habits. For example, in Sweden shared laundries are provided in the majority of multi-store houses, so people do not have to buy own washing machine. Those who want of course can install own washing machine at home.

Traditional economic instruments supporting sustainable lifestyles, such as taxes and charges, can be effective if combined with measures that ensure provision of alternatives. E.g., the London congestion charge is supported by information and improved access to public transport. Governmental grants for new business ideas supporting sustainable lifestyles, e.g. shifting from products to services or social enterprises, can also be very effective.

Education, communication and marketing sustainable consumption and lifestyles is a paramount task for governments and international initiatives, e.g. the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development, can greatly support national policy-makers. The on-going efforts of the Italian Task Force on Education for Sustainable Consumption and the Swedish Task Force on Sustainable Lifestyles and Education for Sustainable Consumption aim to increase awareness about sustainability issues by developing strategies for including sustainable consumption into the agenda of all stakeholders dealing with related issues, e.g. authorities, NGOs, and by introducing the concept into the formal educational curricular.

7.3.2 Examples of business actions towards sustainable lifestyles

Businesses have an important role to play in providing hardware and software for sustainable lifestyles by designing products and services, and by shaping preferences through media and advertising. Business strategies of eco-efficiency are well suited for reducing environmental impacts of products. It is important to create markets for sustainable products and services through direct advertising, education and eco-labelling; businesses could take a more proactive stance in supporting sustainable lifestyles, thereby developing and securing future markets and profits. Some companies have recognised the business opportunity in shifting from selling products to providing systems solutions through, e.g. energy-efficiency services or chemical management services, e.g. as practised by Dow Chemicals. Together with the business of selling cars and after-sales support, some large automotive producers, e.g. Volvo and Mercedes, heavily promote public transportation. Some hotels are starting to include in the selling packages of lodging and mobility services; encouraging tourists to come by train to the hotel. In less affluent societies, new service companies are emerging providing access to unaffordable or unavailable products and infrastructure, e.g. selling washing cycles or minutes of mobile phone use. Communicating environmental and social information to consumers proves to be a smart business strategy for developing new markets. Some companies provide life cycle financial and environmental information to stimulate

purchase of their green products.¹⁰⁹ Few advertise sustainable products and services through TV, cinema and magazines.¹¹⁰ A number of retailers promote ecological, organic or fair trade products and have even developed own brand names for such products, e.g. Coop, ICA.¹¹¹ However, the potential of using the power of advertising, marketing and retailing in promoting sustainable lifestyles is still largely untapped.

7.3.3 Examples of actions of individuals towards sustainable lifestyles

In their role as consumers people can greatly influence the sustainability of their lifestyles by choosing more sustainable products and services. And there are already clear signs that the market for environmentally and socially sound products is growing.¹¹²

Large potential also exist in promoting services, community and grass-root initiatives supported by NGOs or organised by people themselves. Examples of worldwide movements include the Slow Food and Slow Cities movement and simplicity ideas,¹¹³ such as the New American Dream.¹¹⁴ Specific examples of such initiatives include, common practices of renting out cottages to several people throughout a year or hotel sharing programmes, book exchange networks and green consumer clubs.¹¹⁵ Car-sharing is also in many cases organised by people themselves.¹¹⁶ Co-housing communities, eco-villages and creative communities have all similar goal – to respond to the basic needs of today's households and provide childcare, social contact and economic efficiency by combining the autonomy of private dwellings with the advantages of community living. In eco-villages the goal is also to live in environmentally sound way. The project "Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles" is run under auspices of the Swedish Task Force on Sustainable Lifestyles and Education for Sustainable Consumption. It discusses the potential of collaborative everyday life creativity in generating and diffusing new and more sustainable ways of living in the urban environments of emerging countries (with a focus on Brazil, India and China). Within the project various services are developed, including home nursery or "school train" on

¹⁰⁹ Electrolux provides life cycle cost information to promote its more environmentally sound products and service solutions, the initial price of which is higher than similar products of other producers, but the life cycle cost is lower due to more efficient technological solutions for use of electricity and water.

¹¹⁰ E.g. Kia's advertising: "Think before you drive: for long trips use the Sedona, for short ones use your loaf" or Coop Konsum': "We've stopped selling eggs from battery hens. Take 10 people with you in this telephone booth and you will understand why".

¹¹¹ In Europe, fair trade certified products are sold through over 64,800 points of sale (EFTA 2001) In 2002, international organic food market accounted for about US\$ 23 billion (IFOAM and FiBL 2006)

¹¹² The global market for organic products was estimated to be \$25 billion in 2004, and growth rates were between 5 and 40% in different countries. In Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland organic vegetables comprise over 6% of the total market share (Organic Monitor 2005) Fair trade products in the period of 1997-2003 increased in sales from 25,972 MT to 83,480 MT.

¹¹³ Segal, J. M. (2003). *Graceful Simplicity. Toward A Philosophy & Politics Of Simple Living*. New York, Henry Holt.

¹¹⁴ Center for a New American Dream (2007). Homepage of the Center for a New American Dream.

¹¹⁵ SCR (2006). *Sustainable Consumption Roundtable Briefing: Communities of Interest – and Action?* London, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable: 53.

¹¹⁶ The notion of car sharing might be very different in different countries, but provides similar results. E.g., in a Norwegian car cooperative one car is typically shared by 10 members. In Turkey a family of 10 people may share one car. The environmental results of sharing a car are the same in both countries, but the infrastructure and the social network behind are totally different.

foot, where parents collect children from the neighbourhood and walk them to school.¹¹⁷ Local Exchange Trading Schemes are local community-based networks, in which people exchange goods and services without using money. An important contribution to sustainable lifestyles are “grass roots” movements of schools and universities, including the eco-schools movement, the green campuses movement, green-ing conferences or parties, compensating travel with planting trees or buying carbon certificates. Many campuses have car pooling programmes and exchange networks for everything from student flats to clothes.

7.4 Challenges and opportunities

How to create, promote and mainstream **desirable visions of more sustainable living** for different countries/regions and for diverse cultural contexts.? This question remains one of the main challenges. It will be important, for example, to investigate what representations of *traditional and global lifestyles* people in developed and developing economies have and how images of more sustainable lifestyles can be built on cultural, historical, natural and social heritage of different countries.

Another challenge is how to **support and promote innovation for sustainable lifestyles** by *governments and businesses*. Strategies for *enabling infrastructures* require governmental policies, business initiatives and public-private partnerships. It is vital to understand how technology can help create new models of sustainable lifestyles and how business can use its communication power to deliver a different vision of society, aiming at improving quality of life and not only at increasing consumerism.

Perhaps the most profound challenge is **how public authorities can support and strengthen bottom-up initiatives**. Here combination of the hardware (provision of physical spaces, grants and financial schemes) and the software (information dissemination, research and education) is clearly needed, as well as collaboration and support of NGOs, education institutions and communities.

The overarching challenge regards the role of **communication and education** in supporting and promoting and normalising visions of sustainable lifestyles. For that it is important that SCP ideas are introduced from pre-school to university education programmes, but professional and vocational training. In this way, the social capital – the awareness of the critical mass of population and the capacity for change can be created. The two Marrakech Task Forces led by Sweden and Italy play a very important role in this work.

A fundamental challenge is that the **right for more sustainable lifestyles and access to education for sustainable consumption** *should become a universal right*. Therefore, development of more sustainable societies should include devising visions of lifestyles for “non-consumer” class and developing innovative solutions and policy measures for less affluent parts of the world population.

¹¹⁷ Manzini, E. (2006). Creative communities and sustainable lifestyles: enabling platforms to support social innovation promising in terms of sustainability. SCORE, Wuppertal.

7.5 Key questions for the working group

Some key questions to be discussed among the participants in the working group on sustainable lifestyles and education for sustainable consumption (on 27 June, Group 7) are suggested below:

1. How are the key elements for promoting sustainable lifestyles and education for sustainable consumption that could be reflected in the key elements of the 10YFP on SCP?
2. What are the key priorities and actions needed in promoting a desirable vision for sustainable lifestyles in different countries and regions? or in other words, how to change the “software” of our societies?
3. What are the needed policy interventions to ensure the provision of the adequate infrastructure (“hardware”) that enables the adoption of sustainable lifestyles?
4. What are the technological innovations (infrastructure, co-housing, sustainable product/services) needed to enable citizens to adopt sustainable lifestyles?
5. How to engage people in social actions and grass-root activities that promote sustainable lifestyles and work on education for sustainable consumption? How can governments support and replicate promising bottom-up initiatives?