

PEER Environmental Technology Seminar

Oct. 11-12, 2006, Montpellier, France



Parallel session 1c: Sustainable Consumption

Beyond information and education

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Beyond information and education

- ◆ Environmentally sustainable consumption
- ◆ Actors' matrices
- ◆ Households and consumers
- ◆ Consumers can be...
- ◆ Instruments
- ◆ Acceptance
- ◆ Acceptability
- ◆ Research questions

Environmentally sustainable consumption

Household consumption and public consumption

Consumption clusters	Influence of private households	Environmental relevance
Clothing	X	
Education/Training		X
Nutrition/Foodchain	X	X
Health care		X
Construction/Housing	X	X
Hygiene	X	
Cleaning	X	
Recreation	X	
Social life		X
Mobility/Transport	X	X

Actors' matrices: Overlapping responsibilities

Construction and housing	Private households		Public owners	Corporate owners	Local authorities	Planners	Service providers
	Residents	Property owners					
Heating energy consumption	+	+	0	+	+	+	+
Resource intensity	0	+	0	+	+	+	+
Living space	++	+	+	+	+	+	0
Private investment in existing houses / erection of new buildings	0	++	+	0	+	0	0
Settlement area	0	+	++	+	++	0	+

Households and consumers (I. Bluehdorn)

- ◆ Self-construction, self-expression and self experience have, to an unprecedented extent, become a matter of product choices and acts of consumption.
- ◆ The insecurity discourse since the early 1990s has created material and cultural insecurity. Precarisation reactivates “old” strategies to achieve autonomy and reduce risks.
- ◆ Income polarisation leads to increasing consumption of the rich and potentially environmentally damaging consumption of the poor.
- ◆ Necessary and sufficient conditions for sustainable consumption are diverse and not clearly identified so far.

Consumers, the beast out there, are (E.Shove)

- ◆ decision makers, autonomous status-seeking “shoppers”, driven by utilitarian preferences and rational decisions. They are an obstacle to environmental policies to be dealt with by restrictions, incentives and education (rational choice approach).
- ◆ citizens, motivated for the common good. The challenge is not top-down persuasion, but of helping consumers to find ecologically rational ways of achieving the taken-for-granted goals of daily life by eliminating obstacles which so far prohibit a bottom-up greening, by providing green goods and information flows and education (ecological modernisation theory approach).

The beast out there are (E. Shove, cont.)

- ◆ practitioners, their patterns of consumption following from the routine accomplishment of what people take to be “normal” ways of life (such standards, routines and practices are rarely analysed in consumption theory and politics). The challenge thus is to specify and redefine “normality” rather than focussing on consumption per se. Peoples routines and expectations reflect system of social and cultural order, with consumption an obligation to be a manifest part of society. This shapes how well-being and “good life” are conceptualised, and thus consumption patterns. Social insecurity, planning capabilities, power structures and control over time are important parameters shaping consumption behaviour.

The beast out there are (E. Shove, fin.)

- ◆ To promote sustainable consumption, the status quo and thus social and cultural representation of the “good life” must be challenged. New technologies – despite their improved efficiency – do not solve but reinforce problems on this level, unless they are developed and communicated as element of a different social pattern, a regime change (the reconfiguration of a “seamless web” of social, organisational and technological elements. Thus the evolution of technology and of society cannot be separated, but should be thought of in terms of co-evolution, a two way road. This implies the need to identify critical moments or bifurcation points at which socio-technical trajectories can be nudged, if not “steered”, in a different direction, in order to promote configurations of the socio-technical systems such that the environmental burden of “normal” practice is less (transition theory).

Instruments for Sustainable Consumption

- ◆ Consumer information, product information, education are the key means.
- ◆ Normative obligations and moral appeals are the resonance basis for them.
- ◆ This can lead to an demand and information overkill, to ignoring all instead of choosing one advice.
- ◆ Standards and regulations provide a framework.
- ◆ The cost structure provides incentives
- ◆ **All these incentives should be in line and not send contradictory signals**

Acceptance

- ◆ Products are a projection screen for collective and individual identities and visions. If the “screen” is already “occupied” by a label like “environmentally friendly”, its usefulness is reduced.
- ◆ Often, “invisible greening” will be necessary, or green characteristics as an added value, not as the basis for consumption decisions.

Acceptability

- ◆ Products must fit into established routines, or provide a significant, immediate and visible new benefit worthwhile to change them.
- ◆ They must enhance standing and acceptance, i.e. correspond to relevant preferences and values of the peer group.
- ◆ Involving consumers and credible representatives early on in product and technology development gives hints for later acceptability.

Research questions

- ◆ What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for sustainable consumption?
- ◆ How can substitution be made more attractive than accumulation of goods?
- ◆ How can shared management concepts be developed to avoid blockades in situations of overlapping influences?
- ◆ Which external conditions are supportive or even necessary for consumption to change?