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# **Facilitating Sustainable Consumption**

16/10/19

Autumn Course on Circular Economy, Coimbra,  
Portugal

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# Overview:

- ☾ Sustainable- and low carbon - consumption
- ☾ Accounting for GHG emissions
- ☾ Key consumption categories where changes needed
- ☾ Problem of focusing on individual consumption
- ☾ From individual behaviours to social practices
- ☾ Engaging citizens not blaming consumers
- ☾ Towards living well within limits

# Sustainable - and low carbon - consumption

## **Consumption:**

‘the selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair and disposal of any product or service’ (Campbell 1995)

 **Sustainable consumption** ‘broadly denotes the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and foster a certain quality of life, while minimising environmental harm to ourselves and future generations’ (Hobson 2013:1)

 **Low carbon lifestyles** – focus on reducing GHG emissions associated with household consumption (IGES 2019)

# Accounting for GHG emissions:

- ☾ Production based emissions-GHGs directly emitted from households, governments and private sector activities within a country or city
- ☾ Carbon footprints of products
- ☾ Company responsibility for GHG emissions (Griffin 2017)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/09/revealed-20-firms-third-carbon-emissions>
- ☾ **Consumption based accounting:**  
Footprints of countries or **cities** - ‘total emissions associated with goods and services produced and consumed within the city, plus emissions from goods and services imported from the rest of the nation or the world, minus emissions from goods and services produced within the city but exported elsewhere’ (C40 Cities 2019)
- Lifestyle** carbon footprints - ‘carbon footprint of an average household in a country, including its direct emissions from the use of fuels and indirect emissions embedded in products and services purchased’ (IGES 2019:3)- ‘excluding those induced by government consumption and... infrastructure’

# Carbon emissions of everyday consumption

- Massive gaps between current per capita carbon footprints and targets – need for massive reductions, fast.  
<https://www.cusp.ac.uk/themes/aetw/zero-carbon-sooner/>
- Majority of consumption based emissions come from ‘transport, housing and food’ (Druckman & Jackson 2016) ‘nutrition, energy and mobility’ (IGES 2019)- relative weight varies by country and city.
- Areas of lifestyles where changes would yield most benefits - meat and dairy consumption, fossil fuel based energy, car use and air travel (IGES 2019)
- Change via absolute reductions, modal shifts, efficiency improvements



More



Less

# Inequalities in consumption

- ☾ Focus on average consumption masks inequalities in consumption
- ☾ Clear relationship between income and emissions. Richer households consume more (bigger houses, more flights, more cars, more stuff...)
- ☾ Some households need to consume *more* (food poverty, fuel poverty, transport inequality)
- ☾ Message of sustainable lifestyles/low carbon consumption often seem irrelevant to poorer households and can be socially exclusive

# Do individuals have capacity to act?

- ☾ **Personal capacity** – understanding, finances, mobility etc.
- ☾ **Infrastructural capacity** – opportunities and facilities available– public transport, renewable energy...
- ☾ **Cultural capacity** – culture, norms and values which support sustainable consumption
- ☾ **Organisational capacity** – resources and support offered by organisations individual connected to- e.g. workplace schemes, school schemes, church projects, local groups ...

➡ Need to differentiate between individuals in understanding responsibilities

➡ Impact of much everyday consumption beyond individuals' control

(Middlemiss 2010)

# From individual change to facilitating more sustainable practices

- ☾ Focus on ‘normal’ social practices which are unsustainable rather than on individual attitudes and behaviours (driving, washing, cooking)
- ☾ People don’t really consume energy or water but use them in engaging in routine practices, everyday life (Shove 2010)
- ☾ Social practice approach involves exploring how carbon intensive/wasteful ways of doing things become normal  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldEp3r1-8eo>
- ☾ More contextual way of thinking about un-sustainable consumption – role of technology, infrastructure, cultural and social meanings
- ☾ Multiple points of intervention & multiple agents of change

(See Darnton & Horne 2013).

# From individual guilt to political responsibility

- ☾ Focusing on individual responsibility detracts attention from roots of the problem—consumerism and economic growth
- ☾ ‘most of us have not committed individual wrongs; rather we participate by our normal ... actions in processes that produce wrongs... our responsibility is political in the sense that acting on it involves joining in a public discourse where we try to persuade one another about courses of collective action that will contribute to social change’ (Young 2003)



<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/09/polluters-climate-crisis-fossil-fuel>

# Engaging local citizens

- ☾ Engage local citizens in planning for more sustainable living/circular economy:
  - Source of valuable knowledge and ideas
  - Improves legitimacy of decision making
  - If citizens given opportunity to think differently preferences can be transformed and behaviour shaped in a more civic orientation
- ☾ Need for early engagement of workers and communities who depend on carbon intensive industries - and investment in training and skills development
- ☾ Forms of citizen engagement- online forums, citizens juries, citizens' assemblies etc.- people engage in structured decisions about issues of public concern (See John et al 2009)

# Towards living well within limits

- Linking carbon reductions to other agendas- health, leisure, local economy, social inclusion – quality of life

‘Need.. to develop the capacities of all stakeholders ... not only to understand the need for radical transformation...but also to imagine alternatives to current ways of meeting needs’ (IGES 2019)

‘A world with low impact consumption will be more prosperous and happy than the overconsuming, polluted alternative that we are currently heading for’ (C40 Cities 2019)

‘We need a new political imaginary that dwells explicitly on the satisfaction to be had from consuming differently’ (Soper2007)

‘Our guiding vision for sustainable prosperity is one in which people everywhere have the capability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological and resource constraints of a finite planet’. (Tim Jackson)

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**THANK YOU FOR LISTENING.**

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