

## The ecological footprint of green and brown consumers. Introducing the behaviour-impact-gap (BIG) problem



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### Topic

- Resilience
- Lifestyle
- Building
- Resources
- Tourism
- Energy

### Title of the Paper

The ecological footprint of green and brown consumers. Introducing the behaviour-impact-gap (BIG) problem

### Form of Presentation

- Poster
- Presentation

### Short Description (maximum 2500 characters)

Preceding research has hardly made any attempt to measure the ecological impacts of pro-environmental behaviour in an objective way. Those impacts were rather supposed or calculated. The research described herein scrutinised the ecological impact reductions achieved through pro-environmental behaviour and raised the question how much of a reduction in carbon footprint can be achieved through voluntary action without actually affecting the socio-economic determinants of life.

A survey was carried out in order to measure the difference between the ecological footprint of "green" and "brown" consumers. No significant difference was found between the ecological footprints of the two groups – suggesting that individual pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour do not always modify consumption. This finding resulted in the formulation of a new proposition called the BIG (behaviour-impact-gap) problem, which is an interesting addition to research in the field of environmental awareness gaps.

A BIG problem is confronted whenever the required behavioural change is achieved, but the observed ecological effect is minor or missing.

In our survey pro-environmental behaviour was coupled with only a small reduction in ecological footprint in specific areas. Different theoretical reasons why the BIG phenomenon comes into existence were proposed in this paper, but further research is needed. Probably, more emphasis should be placed on communicating the ecological consequences of consumption habits. Awareness raising may provoke spectacular green activity but is apparently ineffective at changing consumption patterns. Although no statistical relationship was found at the macro level between voluntary actions and ecological footprint, there is still a place for individual action. Green dots below the regression line indicate that certain individuals are successful in reducing their ecological impacts while acting green. Hence, environmental behaviour should not be interpreted as superfluous or irrelevant. One can make a difference by being a green dot below the regression line, even though most people would not do the same.

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