

ERSCP 2012: Workshop Design Sheet

Workshop Design and Content

Title of Workshop *

Sustainable Consumption During Times of Crisis

First Trans-Atlantic SCORAI Workshop, Tuesday May 1, 2012, Bregenz, Austria

Short Description of Workshop Outline (max. 2000 characters) *

Theme

(The problem) Research over the past four decades has demonstrated the limits of economic growth and the social and environmental problems associated with contemporary consumption-oriented lifestyles. Efforts to reform unsustainable patterns through development of cleaner production technologies and facilitation of different household decision-making processes have not lead to significant reductions in aggregate material and energy throughputs. At the same time, public policies, commercial inducements, and global media images continue to vigorously promote resource-intensive consumption practices. Meaningful transitions toward sustainable consumption require confronting existing consumerist culture and consumer models and formulating long-term visions based on systemic transformation.

(The challenges and opportunities presented by crisis) Recurrent financial and ecological crises have triggered extraordinary responses from national and transnational governments, multilateral organizations, and central banks. However, it is questionable if and how much these events have instigated new public awareness about the systemic interconnections among growing resource scarcities, widening income disparities, increasing unemployment, pervasive institutional failure, and others. The current wave of instability prompts numerous questions about prevalent consumption patterns in affluent countries and holds challenges and opportunities for scholars and practitioners seeking to envisage more sustainable pathways.

Across much of Europe, austerity policies are prompting reductions in household consumption by, for example, cutting social welfare payments and increasing taxes. While this material downsizing has potential to lower certain sources of ecological stress, it is also emblematic of widening inequality, declining governmental capacity, and increasing political instability. In some especially hard-pressed countries we are already seeing adaptive responses such as the rediscovery of bartering and localized trading as ways to meet daily needs. Though public discontent is spreading, uncertainty remains about whether current forms of political expression will be sufficient to achieve systemic changes consistent with more sustainable consumption, and whether links will be made between activist movements and sustainable development communities. A striking prototype could be Japan, where economic growth has stagnated for more than twenty years and the recent tsunami-induced disasters have compounded the country's despondent economic mood. Indeed, one result may very well be a repackaging and relaunching of the growth paradigm.

(The goal and main theme of the workshop) The ongoing financial crisis—and the flaws that it exposes in the current system of economic organization—signals a need to go beyond customary approaches for conceptualizing sustainable consumption and to envision how we might configure entirely new systems of consumption. This workshop will bring together an international group of researchers and practitioners for focused consideration of these challenges and opportunities.

Papers and presentations

Based on an invitation-only Call for Papers, we are pleased to announce that papers have been accepted by the following authors: Christine Ax and Friedrich Hinterberger, Maurie Cohen, Maria Csutora, Christoph Gran, Andre Martinuzzi et al, Oksana Mont, Michael Redclift, Harald Rohrer and Michael Ornetzeder, Marlyne Sahakian, Joachim Spangenberg, Anneke von Raggamby et al, Sofia Vaz, and Agnes Zsoka and Gyula Zilahy.

We look forward to your participation in this timely and important event.

On behalf of the organizing team,

Sylvia Lorek, Sustainable Europe Research Institute
Maurie Cohen, New Jersey Institute of Technology
Gerd Scholl, Institute for Ecological Economy Research
Willi Sieber, The Austrian Institute of Ecology
Marlyne Sahakian, The Graduate Institute, Geneva

Abstract review committee

Doris Fuchs, University of Münster
Sylvia Lorek, Sustainable Europe Research Institute
Gerd Scholl, Institute for Ecological Economy Research
Arnold Tukker, TNO
Philip Vergragt, Tellus Institute & Clark University

Supporting SCORAI members

SCORAI Europe

Doris Fuchs, University of Münster
Sylvia Lorek, Sustainable Europe Research Institute
André Martinuzzi, WU Vienna
Jaco N. Quist, TU Delft
Lucia A. Reisch, Copenhagen Business School
Marlyne Sahakian, The Graduate Institute, Geneva
Willi Sieber, The Austrian Institute of Ecology
Gerd Scholl, Institute for Ecological Economy Research
Ulf Schrader, TU Berlin
Martin Schweighofer, The Austrian Institute of Ecology
John Thøgersen, Aarhus University
Arnold Tukker, TNO

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