Consumption, Markets, and Sustainability

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I was in Rio de Janeiro for a conference in June. The room was so cold that the participants were putting on whatever flimsy pieces of clothing they could find. Ironically, this conference was on “Sustainable Consumption and Production” and part of the United Nation’s “Rio+20” Conference on Sustainable Development. I wondered why the air conditioning was on so high. Was the AC on so high to keep international participants “appropriately” comfortable? Or did the building lack effective thermostats? If even the organizers of a conference on sustainability will not or are not able to turn the AC down, who will?

The AC in the conference room is usually not what first comes to mind when we speak about consumption, despite its evident excesses and environmental impact. Instead, what comes to mind is consumerism, which is seen as one of the greatest threats to sustainability. Consumerism is not the same thing as consumption. Consumption, granted, is very powerful: it has the potential to enhance or worsen well-being. It can nourish, empower, and liberate consumers or alienate and damage the social fabric and health as well the environment (Ger 1997). This paper is about the dynamics that generate and frame consumption, including its excesses, among those who can afford it, in rich and poor countries. The terms consumerism and consumption imply that agency and responsibility lie with the individual consumer. Yet, consumption is (inter)dependent on market capitalism and definitions and goals of development in economic (growth) and material terms. In other words, consumption and markets are embedded and multiple actors/agents play formative roles. I discuss the dynamics of consumption and markets that lead to high levels of consumption, such as the AC at its full blast. I note that a diverse network of actors are involved in the construction of what are considered to be consumer’s choices, “needs,” or desires. I draw on the literatures in sociology and consumer culture theory (CCT), including my own research on consumer desires, transformation of routines, and the daily consumption practices with their high and low ecological footprints in Turkey and Brazil.

It is widely accepted that current aggregate consumption levels are either already unsustainable or fast approaching that state (Heiskanen and Pantzar 1997). Ever since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, when the environmental implications of contemporary consumption were highlighted, consumers have been given an important role and responsibility in the pursuit of sustainability. The dominant approach has been providing information, expected to lead to a change in values, attitudes, and, hence, behavior. The availability of appropriate knowledge and information about sustainable consumption was thought to be crucial in order to “empower” consumers to change their practices. However, in spite of the availability of such information and educational material, a “knowledge-to-action” gap perseveres (Markkula and Moisander 2012). Even if and when knowledge changes attitudes and values, consumers do not behave in accordance with their articulated, pro-sustainability values (Thøgersen 2005). Neither do consumers trade product benefits for ethical considerations when forced to make such a trade offs (DeVinney, Auger, and Eckhardt 2010). These findings align with the broader and well-established “attitude-behavior inconsistency” and challenges the widespread assumption that choices are shaped by attitudes and values and hence if we change attitudes/values, choices will follow. Holt argues, “if abstract consumerist values shaped consumption, we would expect to see coherent patterns of sustainable and unsustainable consumption. Instead, what we find is that the sustainability of individuals’ consumer actions varies wildly across categories: some people drive a Prius but routinely fly long-distance on vacations; some people buy local organic milk but also veggies grown in the dessert and shipped by air thousands of miles; some people are tireless recyclers but think nothing of tearing out their kitchen to install the latest designs. ... Some of the most environmentally conscious consumers also desire organic fresh fruit and vegetables year-round, which, when combined with vastly improved global logistics and transportation, has led to an
immensely unsustainable agricultural practice, draining scarce groundwater in the near-deserts of North Africa, Spain, and Mexico to grow products that are shipped by air thousands of miles” (2012, 240-243). In consumer research, the attitude/values-behavior model, “[which was in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s, has all but disappeared from contemporary theory because it provides little insight or explanatory power” (Holt 2012, 240). We cannot generate considerable or widespread change towards sustainability based on the information/attitude/values-behavior model and its inherent assumption of the rational, consistent, and autonomous consumer. Thus, although providing useful and applicable information to consumers is very important, we also have to seek additional means, agents, and processes of inducing change.

On the one hand, masses continue consumption as usual – perhaps because sustainable consumption practices appear to be more time-consuming, costly, and stressful, or, the unsustainable alternatives more attractive; or their habits reign. On the other hand, green consumers do exist, even if in small numbers. There are communities of consumers who subscribe to voluntary simplicity, downshifting, consuming greener (seeking out the most environmentally friendly alternatives on offer) products, or reducing their overall consumption (Etzioni 1998; Moisander and Pesonen 2002). Some consumers are indeed using such practices as car sharing (Zipcar) and goods redistribution (Freecycle). These groups advocate alternative lifestyles - Bohemian, countercultural, and subcultural (Moisander and Pesonen 2002). We also see that consumption communities can form around an alternative practice, such as small local organic farming (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). In Thompson and Coskuner Balli’s case of community-supported agriculture, the community subscribes to the anti-industrial-food movement and ideology and builds sociality around that practice.

Such examples can be useful to generate more effective policies with some impact on absolute levels of consumption for the masses. In order to do that, this paper explains current understandings of how consumption is constructed and how it operates in interplay with the markets within which it is embedded. I suggest that, rather than individual consumer choices, our focus should be on the network of market actors whose actions structure consumption patterns, intentionally and unintentionally.

CONSUMPTION: Social Mechanisms, dynamics, practices

Consumption serves individuals as they deal with the tensions, conflicts and anxieties of their daily lives. Gabriel and Lang (1995) deliberate the diverse faces of the consumer: chooser, communicator, identity-seeker, explorer, ‘hedonist or artist,’ victim, rebel, activist, and citizen. Manners and objects of consumption assist this multiple-faced consumer in a variety of ways: to construct, objectify, and communicate self and group identity, relationships to and social differences from people and groups (ethnic, gender, age, subcultural, religious, etc.), and comparative status as well as to pursue emotional and aesthetic pleasures, or to simply make lives more comfortable and easier (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Miller 1989; Slater 1997; Shove 2003; Warde 2005). These have implications for the escalation of consumption over time. A plethora of mechanisms can drive or motivate people to maintain or increase their levels of consumption. The following is a list of these mechanisms (inspired by but substantially modified from Shove and Warde 1998).

1. Social comparison: Veblen’s work on conspicuous consumption, Bourdieu’s work on taste and cultural capital, and subsequent scholarship (Holt; Ustuner and Holt; Warde) on social positions reveal that accumulation and display of goods serve to demonstrate status and prestige. Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of distinction points to the relationship between social position and lifestyle. While Bourdieu emphasizes the competitive struggle over the legitimacy of class cultures, others suggest that the contemporary cultural pluralism undermines any hierarchical system of judgment: lifestyles continue to demarcate social group boundaries, but in a more playful way (Shove and Warde 1998). Regardless of how competitive or playful the status game might be, many resource-intensive
luxuries are arguably coveted (Schor 1998) due to distinction-seeking. While most environmentalists regard social comparison as the foremost culprit, it must be noted that social comparison could also prompt the installation of solar panels (Dard 1986).

2. Constitution, objectification, and communication of identity and relationships: The key notion here is that, self-identity in modernity is less fixed and given than in pre-modern society and hence becomes a reflexive choice of lifestyle among different options (Giddens 1991), a task in which consumption plays a major role. Individuals define and express themselves through the messages their manner of consumption communicates; hence, products (and how they are used) make meaning and are meaningful. Identity studies (in cultural studies and CCT) focus mostly on the meanings of artifacts; and hence, the experiential, aesthetic and emotional - rather than the utilitarian - aspects of consumption. Miller (1989 and other works) and other material culture scholars provide another perspective: they argue that, rather than merely communicate, goods objectify relationships; accordingly, they focus on the specifics of materiality in interplay with meanings.

Perhaps what makes identity-constructing consumption to particularly escalate demand is the multiplicity in contemporary identities and that the individual belongs to a plurality of significant relationships. Today, the individual seeks to present her/himself in multiple ways, with multiple faces (Gabriel and Lang 1995), in different situations. This is again communicated through the imagery and style of possessions. Or objectified with select artifacts. Moreover, a key identity tension for the consumer is the quest for normalcy, normativity, or being accepted versus individuality, uniqueness, and social difference. Resolution and negotiation of such a sameness-difference tension may tend towards generating a wide range of requisite possessions and consumption experiences. Or again, it may lead to green consumerism. Moisander and Pesonen (2002) contend that much of environmental advocacy represents a style of life, a resistance to power that produces the prevalent forms of consumer subjectivity, and refusing what we are or (re)inventing who we are by adopting new forms of subjectivity.

3. The fashion cycle and the “Diderot Effect”: Simmel argued that fashion, underscoring individual choices rather than conventions, is a defining aspect of modernity. Fashion works to offer consumers the opportunity to express individuality, while at the same time enjoying the security of doing that within normalized frames (Gronow, 43 in the book ordinary consumption), thus provides a means to deal with the sameness-difference tension of identity. From a sustainably perspective, the link between fashion and obsolescence, and hence, waste is clear. Another aesthetic work, which deems former possessions unacceptable, is the matching of a constellation of objects, termed the Diderot Effect (McCracken 1988). Diderot received a new red robe de chambre as a present. Because it made other items in his study seem shabby, Diderot gradually replaced his desk, curtains and other items, so as to complement his new robe. In such a situation, a new item renders all others intolerable, and each new acquisition requires alteration to another. As McCracken argues (1988, 127), “the Diderot effect has clear ‘ratchet’ implications for consumer expenditure. It helps to move the standard of consumption upward and prevent backward movement.”

4. Rituals, celebrations, and gift-giving: Globally spreading and escalating occasions for gift giving and celebration: Christmas, St. Valentine’s Day, mother’s day, father’s day, etc.

5. Everyday routines: The work on ordinary consumption and practice theory (Gronow; Reckwitz 2002; Shove; Schatzki 2002; Warde 2005 among others) underscore how daily routine inconspicuous practices change over time, leading to the use of more and more resources. Consider the utilities, the use of appliances, the lighting and central heating, or the upwardly shifting standards of cleanliness, comfort, and convenience. Wilhite and Lutzenhiser (1997) argue that social loading is one process that drives such upwardly shifting standards. Their study of lighting in Norway indicates that lighting preference is not driven by any physical criteria concerning amount of lumens, but rather a social load: a cultural criteria that light be created in such a way as to provide coziness and
aesthetic correctness. Together with lamps, bulbs, cords, tables for the lamps, etc. which support such lighting practice, this socially-driven load becomes energy and materials intensive.

Everyday routines are part of a “habitus” (Bourdieu). Habitus, a system of dispositions for thought and action that confronts and mediates new experiences, structures and is also structured by those very practices. Dispositions for action are deeply embedded in routines and habits. And consumers typically take their routines, habits, habitus for granted, without much reflection. Despite being habitual and deeply set in habitus, daily routines do change, with wide ranging environmental consequences. Sahakian and Wilhite (2014) argue that a central question for those interested in transitioning to a more sustainable society is how to reshape dispositions.

A practice-theoretical focus delineates the interplay of routinely performed acts, rather than individual consumer choices. Halkier and Jensen’s (2011) study of food consumption delineates how practices such as food provisioning, cooking and eating are carried out by the consumer. The consumer, as a carrier of food practices, navigates the other daily practices such as parenting, working, commuting. Moreover, practices are embedded in the conditions of larger institutional dynamics, such as how the whole supply-side of food production and retailing is working, how the national and transnational public regulations are organized and implemented, and how these private and public dynamics are interrelated. Then, again, we should neither be privileging the individual consumer as an actor nor attributing an undue role to individual choices when considering possibilities towards sustainability.

INSERT: Actor network theory (Latour, Law)

6. Legitimation of excessive consumption: Consumption is a moral as well a social and cultural phenomenon. People find various ways to moralize/legitimize their own consumption patterns in order to justify them as being necessary and decent. Belk and I find that many middle class consumers engage in high levels of consumption despite having a distaste for materialism and excessive consumption. Justifications and excuses help people reconcile their high levels of consumption and aspirations with their negative view of materialism (Ger and Belk 1999). In a study of Western Europeans, Romanians, Turks and Americans, we found the following justifications: joyous passionate connoisseurship, instrumentalism, and altruism - sharing with (or for the benefit of) the loved ones, especially their children. Excuses (denials of responsibility) involved “the society/media made me do it,” “ways of the modern world,” and deservingness (achievement-based or relative deprivation based). These accounts draw from the ethics prevalent in the consumer’s culture: Romantic hedonism, Protestant utilitarianism, altruistic sociality, generalized sociality – being part of a world of progress, and fairness or equity. Such internalized ethics and ideologies not only legitimize consumption but also convert wants into felt needs. If consumers, in new and established consumer societies, find such culturally appropriate ways to justify their own high-level consumption acts or aspirations, then the immediate future is one of further growth in consumption aspirations around the world.

7. Hedonism and novelty: Seeking pleasure and ever more new-and-improved stuff are perhaps the most defining aspects of consumerism. Campbell’s Romantic Hedonism calls attention to the pleasurable imagination that precedes buying and explains much of the allure of shopping. Scitowsky (1976) and Csikszentmihalyi (1992) explain that people pursue new objects, new tastes, and new pleasures because they are stimulating and avert boredom. While pleasure-seeking seems to be rather psychological, this tendency is reinforced and elevated, and almost constructed to be a duty to pleasure by market capitalism (Collier 1997). Consumer fantasies can be pleasurable and fun (Campbell 1987)

8. Desire: Desire is the motivating force behind much of consumption. Bridging psyche and the social world, consumer desire is a passion born between consumption fantasies and the market (Belk, Ger and Askegaard 2003). Desire exists as lack only if the thing that might fill that lack is socially
esteemed – thus the connections between the psyche and the social/cultural. Advertisers, brands, retailers, displays, fashion, magazines on home decoration, boating, electronics, and seeing others consume on the streets, on TV, in magazines, social media all help construct the objects of desire. We, consumers, on the other hand, speak in terms of “needs” - naturalizing the social institution that positions an object as necessary and therefore natural/normal.

We discern that desire is an embodied passion involving a quest for otherness, sociality, danger, and inaccessibility. Underlying and driving the pursuit of desire, we find self-seduction, desire for desire, fear of being without desire, hopefulness, and tensions between seduction and morality. The dialectical tensions we find – e.g., fun versus guilt, enjoyment vs. danger, pleasure versus health, freedom versus the enslavement of addiction, social acceptance vs. transgressive pleasure, vitality versus balance - reflect the conflict between seduction and morality and generate the dynamism of desiring cycles. The choice of the object of desire emerges as a resolution of such tensions. For example, on one hand, the vitality and pleasure of desire rest on breaking the order, monotony, routines, limits, and rules, but on the other hand, self-control, moral conduct, sociality, and mimesis are themselves desirable. While seduction concerns the bodily and imaginative experience of desire for the person, framed by social and market determinations of what the desirable objects are, morality concerns the anticipated social consequences of harboring and acting on this desire (e.g. social order, duty, and sociability) – mingling the individual and the social.

The above eight mechanisms all have the potential to increase the frequency and amount of consumption. When we consider that each and, usually, all are at work, then the environmental consequences intensify. Any attempt to change this embedded, interactive, distributed, multi-actored set of mechanisms requires a detailed understanding of a particular object and practice of consumption – and the tensions entailed - in the totality of its context. Importantly, what appears to be individual choices, decisions, or desires are anything but individual. Consumption is not about individualized choosing among disconnected products; but instead about a muddier world of interconnected constellations, fashions, rituals, a “world of embedded, inter-dependent practices and habits” (Shove and Warde 1998), grounded in notions such as normality, comfort, and convenience, among others. Consumption (except among consumers in poverty) is not about personal needs, but about socially constructed desires. Moreover, consumption is part of a process of social communication, of indicating to others something about one’s social standing or identity. It is about materiality. And finally, navigated and negotiated among and by network of actors – more and less powerful. Thus, perhaps departing from the majority of the work and thinking in consumer culture and consumer policy studies, we need to de-privilege the individual consumer in order not to miss out the social dynamics into which consumption processes are embedded. This implies that rather than focusing on consumer’s responsibilities and rights, we should consider the roles of the each and the entire network of market actors.

**DISCOURSES/IDEOLOGIES THAT IMPEL AND FRAME CONSUMPTION**

Embedded in and fueling the social and mental mechanisms of consumption are various discourses, which have significant consequences for escalating consumption. Two obvious and interrelated and globally traveling discourses are the ethos of “the good life” or prosperity, and the ethos of consumerism. The former circulates and reifies images of the good life to be more money, affluence, and better, bigger, and more things. The latter promotes, even more directly, consumer desires and objects of desire (Ger and Belk 1996), as well as the desire to desire. These two generate the entrenchment of a ‘work and spend’ orientation (Cross 1993; Schor 1992, 1998).

Another ethos that underlines consumption practices, particularly the routinized ones, is the ethos of normality. The definitions of what is normal and not normal have historically been changing and escalating (Shove 2003; Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012; Wilhite and Lutzenheiser 1997). So, today
we have an everyday life, which increasingly relies on appliances and automobiles to satisfy an increasing demand for ecologically problematic services like mobility, hygiene, and culinary and indoor comfort. For example, the air conditioner is one among other appliances, which has become an indicator of success and well being and thus widely used, despite the notion that it is bad for health. A study of Mitsubishi advertising during 1965-1995 in Japan finds that while the text messages emphasized the physical aspects such as quietness and the unobtrusiveness of the device, the images showed a progression of re-definitions of the modern, normal Japanese home and the place of appliances, including the air conditioner (Wilhite et al. 1996). Such advertising contribute to social loading. Similarly, the standards for a normal kitchen or a normal bathroom have been climbing; the frequencies of showering and washing laundry have also been rising.

The fourth pertinent ideology is that of the **autonomous individual and free choice** (and their triplet, free markets). One wonders if there is any consumer sovereignty given that $450 billion is spent on advertising per year worldwide, half of it in the USA, $800 per American or that of the world’s largest 100 economies, 51 are corporations and only 49 are nation states (Myers and Kent 2004). Or, if the consumer knows what is best for him/her given such powerful commercial influences. Adam Curtis’ astute 2002 television documentary “Century of the Self” shows how the idea of the self, and satisfaction of the self, came to dominate society; how businesses and politicians were involved; and how the rise of the self is a way of “engineering consent” and controlling people in “an age mass democracy”.

Individualized consumption: rooms, cameras, TVs, etc.

Choice per se may well be rather illusory. Consider the homemakers who become bound into new patterns, which are dependent on the very appliances, which are supposed to free them from household chores. Individuals do come to feel that they have a free will, a freedom to choose their lifestyle; this entails a particular (modern) self-construction, related to the historical social process of individualization (Shove and Warde 1998). But, this does not mean that they are really free agents. While we might have a choice of selves, Foucault (1984, 1985,1986) argues, becoming a choosing self is not freedom but a strategy of modern governance – no longer imposed by traditional institutions but rather internalized in the form of ethics and embedded in the range of lifestyles available for the choosing. As self-managing subjects, we navigate our consumption acts, refine our consumption desires, and generate legitimations in order to feel or become an ethical person.

The illusory nature of autonomy and choice imply that placing the responsibility for sustainability on the individual consumer may be misplaced and counterproductive, perhaps even a way to dodge the issue. The notion of consumer social responsibility, consistent with the neo-liberal discourse of the autonomous sovereign consumer, will blind sustainability proponents to the workings of the market and politics. Instead, we need to understand how choice and the very subjectivity of the consumer are constructed by a network of actors and the multiple discourses in that arena (see Karababa and Ger 2011; Sandikci and Ger 2010) in a specific context. Network of institutions and actors with countervailing discourses can change practices.

The sustainability discourse can potentially provide a countervailing force to the above four dominant discourses. Countervailing discourses are influential in generating new practices (Thompson). However, Markkula and Moisander (2012) find that consumers are confused by the ambiguous diversity within the sustainability discourse. To deal with that confusion, they engage in discursive struggles between the sustainability discourse and the dominant ones - the economic material prosperity; respective responsibilities of individual versus institutional actors; and the aesthetic norms (of the world of fast fashion that they study). It seems that, if the sustainability discourse evolves into a less confusing form, its power will rise.

**NOTE:** As Slater (1996) discusses, consumer culture is strongly bound up with the very essence of modernity. A change toward more sustainable consumption, depending on a change of values and
behavior by a majority of individual consumers, thus raises quite fundamental problems and tensions in contemporary society that make such prospects unlikely.

MARKETS
The connections of consumer desire to market capitalism and its institutions and discourses of modernity and individualism, propagated by market tools such as marketing, advertising, and media were evident in the narratives of consumers (Belk, Ger, Askegaard 2003). Desire to desire and paradoxes between seduction and morality not only keep the consumer alive, but, in turn, also keep consumerist ideologies alive. However, to be able to pursue a desire, and sometimes even to feel it and conceive of it as a desire, we must feel that we have the right, entitlement, and justification to do so, implying a market-based subjectivity – market logic. We observed that the only group of people who felt that they could not entertain consumer desires were the older rural Turkish informants who did not grow up in a market society. Similarly, Collier (1997) found that in rural Spain, the onset of market capitalism shifted subjectivities, from a focus on the family and duty to a focus on the individual desire – a fundamental shift of moralities from duty to desire.

Cultural mediators: The meanings of products and practices, the notions and expected levels of normality, convenience, comfort, and cleanliness, the routines themselves emerge and solidify over time with exposure to objects, to the contexts/occasions in which these objects are used, and to the people who use these objects, either directly (friends) or indirectly via the media. Advertising and the fashion industry provides symbols: in films, television series, internet, MTV, videos, popular magazines, and comic books. Diamonds, for example, came to be a gift of love and a must for a wedding ring through decades of Hollywood film scenes and radio programs of marriage proposals with a diamond ring and photographs of queens and other celebrities wearing diamonds, all of which were engineered by the De Beers monopoly in the beginning of the century. The Frankfurt School highlighted the manipulative capacities of mass media and its impact on the individual psyche and social relations.

Schaefer and Crane 2005: “There has been a marked shift in advertising from informative advertising styles, focusing on the functional benefits of products, to an image-based and dreamlike style of advertising, which focuses on the symbolic benefits of buying, owning, and using products (Brown 1995)...... Ewen (1976, 1988) argues that advertising contributes materially to an obsession with style, which has the ability to promote social control and a dominant way of seeing the world. In this way, advertising is encouraging people to participate in cycles of disposal that represent, on an ecological level, some of the most fundamental crises of contemporary life” (88).

Media, fashion, and advertising are not the only culprits. Production and technological innovations also impact expectations and norms, upwardly shifting levels of comfort, cleanliness, convenience, and normality (Shove). Cowan (1983) demonstrated how the development of infra-structural systems has the effect of locking households into certain ways of reproducing themselves on a daily basis. She examined eight systems - that supply food, clothing, health care, transportation, water, gas, electricity and petroleum products, which, through industrialization, played a part in altering the nature of domestic labour. Cowan discussed why it was still the case that women legitimately claimed that their work was never done despite supposedly timesaving appliances. She argued that new technical systems altered expected levels of performance, for example, washing machines raised expectations about how often clothes should be washed.

Product design and aesthetics in production: Examining clothing markets, Markkula and Moisander (2012) point to the lack of product alternatives, product information, and labels that inform consumers about production conditions. Moreover, they note the unattractiveness and higher prices of organic clothes compared to “normal” clothes, and their limited assortments, measurements, and styles. Sustainable product choices must be as attractive as others –
importance of design and aesthetics

Myers and Kent 2004: Fashion industry & sustainable consumption: designers together with retail giants from Versace to Marks & Spencer, are reflecting a growing demand for “ethical” and “green” products (124). Supported by a web-based fashion magazine Lucire. “Challenge: how to make fashion sustainable and sustainability fashionable?” (125)

The logic of capitalism – neoliberal markets: the biggest barrier

We also need to understand the role of the state, and its relation to capital, in the process of physical, material and social reproduction (the concept of collective consumption, Castells (1977 [1972]). Karababa and Ger 2011.

In sum: consumption, discourses, markets - materiality, meanings, network of actors.

Who should reduce: the ones already consuming more than the rest: affluent consumers in developed and developing countries. The new rich and even the new middle classes in emerging economies. Also producers of ecologically responsible products and services and governments committed to meeting international environmental treaties. But many (US govn) consider economic growth and employment more important. Interested in increasing material consumption: national and multinational companies seeking to increase market share and market size, the suppliers and distributors of nonrenewable resources, and consumers who construct their sense of self from consuming resource-intensive goods.

Roles of different actors: Individuals: key locus of action for more sustainable consumption; Marketers: respond to consumer demand for greener products and services; Public policy: education of consumers, removal of barriers to individual green behavior; Social groups and entities: limited role.

Markkula and Moisander (2012): The notion that it is the individual consumer’s responsibility to initiate and work towards change: based on a somewhat unrealistic, over-optimistic view of the cultural and material reality. Need open discussion on the roles and responsibilities of other market actors. “In fashion and clothing markets, for example, business representatives have long tended to deny that the contemporary fashion system had any significant role in driving overconsumption.” All parties must openly acknowledge the fact that the fashion industry, through complex networks of cultural mediators and economic actors, has an important role in shaping the collective conventions of normal practice (Shove 2003) in ways that constitute a major challenge for sustainable development.

Consumption embedded in social life: Existing social actors are resistant to change—wider social, economic, and political transitions are necessary to address sustainability; Individuals: less emphasis on their actions; Public policy: could limit promotion of symbolic function of new consumer goods; could promote more sustainable ways of fulfilling social and cultural needs; limits imposed by other development goals; Marketers: may be unwilling to promote new ways of fulfilling social and cultural needs because of reduced growth potential; Civil society/media: promotion of civil discourse about redirection of social and cultural functions of consumption

Markkula and Moisander (2012): need for consumer policy makers to shift their focus from simply informing and educating individual consumers to more systemic measures that are based on acting upon not only consumer perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes but also on the broader cultural and political contexts where consumers live their everyday lives.
ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES TO GENERATE CHANGE IN DAILY PRACTICES TOWARDS GREATER SUSTAINABILITY

I am pessimistic about voluntary simplicity or downshifting or green consumerism as a mainstream lifestyle of the future excepting an ecological catastrophe. Given the contemporary neoliberal market mechanisms and the interlinked notions of the “normal” life and the ideologies of the “good life,” a significant reduction in levels of consumption seems unlikely. Not as long as we see others as enjoying what we consider to be a more desirable lifestyle. The key is that word “desirable”. If we can change what is seen to be desirable, then there is hope. Alternative definitions of success and well-being at the national and the personal level (not GDP, not bigger and more things). Alternative definitions of well-being: Human development and humane consumption (Ger 1997).

If we do a multitude of the following, over time, slowly, we can generate some change. Piecemeal, bit by bit.

Yet, if we can find ways to use the market against the market - in a jiu jitsu manner - and simultaneously awaken community engagement with grassroots initiatives, we can possibly generate some change.

What not to do (merely):

Schor (1995) argues that well-intentioned appeals to adopt austere lifestyles on environmental or moral grounds are less likely to change behavior than offering the alternative of a higher-quality life.

Scitovsky’s (1989a, 1992): consumption is an inevitable and ongoing everyday process rather than something to be avoided as necessarily undesirable or unsustainable. Scitovsky maintained that the problem of material overconsumption is rooted in the lack of skilled consumption. Reading a good book, listening to music, intelligent conversation, etc. are all resource-light forms of consumption that require the consumption skills involved in literary, musical and conversational appreciation.

Not merely consumer education & empowerment
Not “save the planet”
Not “consumer diet” : Myers and Kent 2004: Sustainable consumption “need not be a case of endlessly foregoing this and sacrificing that. On the contrary, it could actually supply us with more fulfilling lifestyles.” (p.121)

What to do?

- Fun, easy to do/use (fun, convenient, cool)
- Fashionable/popular
  - Aesthetically & sensually & spiritually pleasing
  - Social norms - people do what similar others or desirable others do
    - Cialdini’s study on towel reuse and energy conservation: environmental protection or benefit to society or money appeals don’t work; normative appeals work
- Mimesis
- Most People will not change their routines in order to save the planet. But, they can change their routine consumption practices iff the alternatives to high consumption levels are constructed to be:
  - fun, pleasurable, easy, comfortable
  - fashionable/popular
- through the partnership of institutions

1. First and foremost: Action from each and every actor in the network: e.g. change building regulations so that spaces lend themselves to natural ventilation (AC case); smart thermostats with a minimum low point; building and government regulations on minimum temperatures; higher prices or taxes below a certain temperature, etc.; advertising for fresh air; social media pressure for natural ventilation and minimum temperatures (e.g. 22°C)

Take greater account of infrastructure both in relation to urban planning and the role of utilities in the development of power lines, water mains etc., and in terms of the design and organisation of key arenas like kitchens and bathrooms. “In other words we need to know more about the processes and decisions, often commercial, which frame the options and possibilities within which people in turn make choices. The distribution of railway networks, petrol stations, and roads make different forms of transport more and less possible.” (Shove and Warde)


The study illustrates how Melbourne’s water marketing system responded to the shock of drought and then was reset through changes in the formal (legislature within the market system) informal (social norms), and philosophical (organizing principles) antecedents of the marketplace. Change was facilitated in part through public policy but also through the interplay between the antecedent classes that enabled new marketplace outcomes to occur. consumers shifted their perspective on water consumption from a right to consume to a view that water needed to be consumed responsibly. To facilitate awareness of consumers’ rights and responsibilities with regard to water consumption, the water retailers incorporated marketing tools into their engagement with consumers. Used bill comparison tables; no price increase...... Using the example of Melbourne, Australia, this article highlights how, over time, a combination of severe drought, legislative changes, education, public discourse, and marketing can contribute to shift the antecedents of the water consumption marketplace from the right to use water to responsibility for water. Furthermore, we illustrated how the antecedents interacted to enable new outcomes and a realignment of marketing systems. First, we illustrated how changes in public policy are effective in the context of marketing systems, if these changes are integrated into the cultural (informal) and ideological (philosophical) foundations of the aggregate marketing system.

Myers and Kent 2004: Eco-technologies: eliminate inefficiencies of raw materials and energy. Energy efficiency, better water use, recycling, waste management, pollution controls, closed-loop manufacturing, zero-emissions industry; designing products for repair, reuse, renovation, remanufacturing, and as a last resort, recycling (127). There currently are enough eco-technologies to enable everyone to enjoy twice as much material well-being while using only half as much raw materials and energy and causing only half as much pollution and other types of waste- Factor Four strategy endorsed by many corporations and governments. Factor 10 is on its way. “Several leading corporations such as DuPont, Dow Chemical, Honda, and Panasonic see it as a powerful mode to gain competitive advantage.” (127, see bottom p. 130 too). The US alone could save $300 billion per year through energy efficiency (Lovins & Lovins, 2002, in the American Prospect.

Schaefer and Crane 2005: “While individual behaviors would still seem to play a role, given that it is individuals, or at least households, who do much of the actual purchasing and consuming of goods and services, it also needs to be recognized that they have to act within what the systems in which they exist offer them as options (Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997). If consumption is seen as embedded in our very society and culture, we may thus place less emphasis on individual behaviors and more on systemic approaches, and the recognition of the roles of a much wider set of social actors comes to the forefront.” ......“Yet it has to be recognized that many governments,
particularly those espousing a free-market orientation, have shown themselves to be quite reluctant to take any policy measures aimed at curbing consumption and thus industrial activity (Cohen 2001), as already discussed above. Explanations for this are not too hard to come by. We could follow the reasoning of Karl Marx that political superstructures are always determined by the economic substructure and that governments are therefore generally the willing assistants of the economically powerful forces in society. Another explanation (not incompatible with the first) is that many governments quite genuinely believe in the importance of economic growth, and experience shows that those governments that are held responsible for a downturn in economic activity often find re-election difficult” (88).

2. Make sustainable practices alluring: Use the market against the market: jiu jitsu principle: enlist the market to make sustainability classically cool. Fashion industries, media (conventional and social), marketing, movies,

Similar to the jiu jitsu fighter that tries to utilize the force of the counterpart in his own favour, market actors and cultural mediators can be used to make low ecological footprint consumption practices and decreased consumption desirable and fashionable. Not a diet but something cool and attractive. Use tools of the trade of fashion industry: trendspotters, spread low ecological footprint practices like fashion. (beware that fashion goes out of fashion – so attempt to make it a classic rather than a fad).

Unless the image of the low impact practices attain the attraction and allure of consumption, that is the symbolism of being joyful, passionate, exciting, fun, sociable/relational, modern, progressive, not more than a few alternative consumers will turn to it.

Seduction of less-resource intensive manners of consumption: e.g. local and seasonal foods, slow food movement....

Alternative sources of hope and desire: aesthetic enjoyment of arts & nature – something sublime? Something social: human conversation. These need to be made cool and desirable.

Attractive symbols may be chosen and attached to low impact practices by focusing on the ambivalences inherent in a practice, such as stress of driving, or the taste of the home-made and the local, and within the particular historical trajectory of a culture. In delivering the messages, trendsetters, celebrities would be influential as role models and opinion leaders and can be portrayed in the media. A popular film star or a pop music star demonstrating how s/he engages in a particular low footprint practice for herself/himself and/or for her/his children is likely to be effective. Borrowing marketers’ promotion and publicity methods, low footprint practices can be inserted in films, television programs, and cartoons for kids. Social media. Recruit Hollywood and Bollywood. Enlist twitter, Facebook, Instagram, vine, etc.


• Use ideology makers (learn from branding – Holt’s iconic brands, Thompson’s market mythologies). Use and enroll the fashion industry ad trend makers: media, movies, ads, "For example, in terms of consumption as pleasure seeking, it would seem that environmentally oriented consumption need not be envisaged as necessarily joyless or self-denying. Pleasure may be gained from aspects other than merely the somewhat austere satisfaction of having done one’s bit to “save the planet.” Consumers may, for instance, derive pleasure from the look, feel, and taste of more environmentally benign product alternatives, such as organically produced garments using natural fibers and dyes or organically produced, traditional varieties of fruit and vegetables, to give just two examples. Such goods can also confer socially desirable sign value onto consumers, such as
being seen as “a good mother” by buying “natural,” organic foods and other goods for one’s children (Burgess et al. 2003) in addition to addressing health concerns that an increasing number of consumers have about conventionally produced food stuffs. As Prothero and Fitchett (2000) argue, ecological (and health) goals can be aligned with a “green commodity discourse” that presents such goals as “positive” and “glamorous.” (Schaefer and Crane 2005, 85). only to the extent that it involves growth opportunities for firms.

Civil society: Open dialogue among the actors of civil society, such as developed in Habermas’s (1981) thoughts on the ideal speech act, may be able to move thinking in this direction and perhaps even start shifting the dominant paradigm in the long term. It has to be recognized, however, that the ideal speech act is to many a highly idealistic and aspirational account of social communication. Perhaps the notion that civil society could somehow “decide” to change the dominant paradigm toward more sustainable consumption, in the face of strong and real short-term economic interests in keeping consumption levels high, is equally idealistic. Alternatively, a Foucaultian perspective might suggest that we are currently faced with an episteme where the value of material possession and economic growth is taken for granted (89).

3. Green capitalism?: Joshua Reno, 2011 “Motivated markets: Instruments and Ideologies of clean energy in the United Kingdom,” Cultural Anthropology, Vol. 26, Issue 3, pp. 389–413. examines efforts to reconcile capitalist and ecological values, focusing in particular on the instruments and ideologies that pervade the United Kingdom’s developing renewable energy sector. In keeping with neoliberal models of economic knowledge and practice, renewable energy instruments target the motivations of individuals by using incentive programs to reach environmental policy goals……. “Green” capitalism (Foster 2002; Hawken et al. 1999) is concerned with the reconciliation of ecological and economic values. By green capitalism, I refer to forms of political economy that seek to appropriate the reproductive potential of biomaterials or to nurture and sustain such potential or both. ….. I emphasize the role of market devices, especially renewable energy meters and auctions, in furthering neoliberal models of the economic, as well as providing a means of contesting them. Such devices not only help market participants calculate their interests and make economic decisions, they also make the motivations of those participants calculable as objects of economic knowledge” (391).

4. New social movements: Grassroots – new voluntary creative communities. The mobilizing factors tend to focus on cultural and symbolic issues that are linked with issues of identity. New social movements are more “acted out” in individual actions rather than through or among mobilized groups. New social movements often involve personal and intimate aspects of human life, they extend into arenas of daily life: what we eat, wear, and enjoy. The ideological characteristics of the new social movements are not overarching ideologies but rather pluralistic values and ideas with pragmatic orientations. New social movement as a “collective search for identity” defined by Gusfield et al. (1994). E.g. voluntary simplicity. (Etzioni, 1998). Community agriculture (Thompson and Coskuner)

Sahakian and Wilhite 2014
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