


**Developing Policies and Instruments for Sustainable Consumption: Irish Experiences and Futures**

1<sup>st</sup> May 2010  
Conference of Irish Geographers  
NUI Maynooth


Jessica Pape, Trinity College Dublin

 consensus  
consumption environment sustainability

www.consensus.ie

## Overview


- **Introduction:** The debate on Sustainable Consumption (SC) and Development (SD)
- **Governance:** The challenge to design policy strategies for SC which work
- **Irish Context:** Challenges and Opportunities to achieve SC in Ireland
- The **ConsEnSus** project: Consumption, Environment and Sustainability in Ireland

 consensus  
consumption environment sustainability

www.consensus.ie

## Many Definitions of SC


“Sustainable consumption is a key concept in the sustainable development paradigm, which **calls for individuals in high-income countries to consider, and take action on**, the environmental impacts of their household consumption practices” (Hobson 2002: 95).

 consensus  
consumption environment sustainability

www.consensus.ie

## Consuming less?

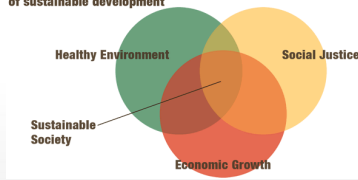
- “Promoting sustainable consumption and production are important aspects of sustainable development, which depends on achieving long-term **economic growth** that is consistent with environmental and social needs ... promoting sustainable consumption is equally important to limit negative environmental and social externalities as well as to **provide markets for sustainable products**” (OECD 2008)

 consensus  
consumption environment sustainability

www.consensus.ie

## A Balancing Act?

The three components of sustainable development




Healthy Environment      Social Justice

Sustainable Society

Economic Growth

Economic Growth = social and political Stability?


- “Prosperity without Growth” (Jackson 2009)
- “Post-Growth Society” (Speth 2010)

 consensus  
consumption environment sustainability

www.consensus.ie


## Why does it matter?

### Only One World



**EU:**  
3 Planets

**USA:**  
5 Planets

 consensus  
consumption environment sustainability

www.consensus.ie

## The Challenge of Affluence\*



- 'Consumption is good: more consumption is better'?
- Paradigm of Consumer sovereignty, freedom of choice
- Questions of Wellbeing and Happiness
- BUT: Materialism / GDP Growth does not trigger happiness

\* Offer 2006



www.consensus.ie

## Solutions?

- Consuming less, differently or not at all?
- Green Consumerism: incremental steps not enough? New Politics and Social Movement necessary?
- Can Technology save us? Efficiency versus rebound effects
- Focus on Individual: Danger of 'shifting the burden' and "blaming the victim" (Thøgersen 2005)



www.consensus.ie

## Structure and Social Context

- Consumption Patterns reflect socio-cultural values which differ among nations
- Structure = context in which individuals make decisions
  - Social norms (symbolic value of consumption)
  - Institutional and policy context
  - Infrastructure
  - Political Culture
  - Time and Place



www.consensus.ie

## Addiction to Novelty?

"Physical infrastructure and social architecture conspire against us. Lured by our evolutionary roots, bombarded with persuasion, and seduced by novelty: we are like children in the sweet shop, knowing that sugar is bad for us; unable to resist the temptation." (Jackson 2009).



www.consensus.ie

## Need for Governance

- Role of Governance Mechanisms: **Balancing individual freedoms against the common good** (Jackson 2009)
- 'Sustainability doesn't come naturally to US' (Dawkins 2001)
- 'Financial and Environmental Crisis is systemic': failure of state to **intervene appropriately** in the market place (Speth 2010)



www.consensus.ie

## 'Good Governance'

UN Agenda 21:

"Process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).

**Characteristics Good Governance:**

- **Participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law.** It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society" ([http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/res\\_agenda21\\_36.shtml](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/res_agenda21_36.shtml))



www.consensus.ie

## International Policy Approaches

- International: many actors, different interests, hard to come to binding agreements
  - EU SCP Action Plan 2008: no mandatory quantifiable targets for MS (Nash 2009)
  - Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change: no binding results / targets on which members agreed; badly organized

www.consensus.ie



## Governance Mechanisms

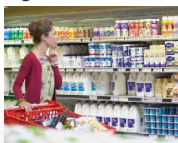
- Strategies / Instrument Types:
  - State Level (Top-down)
    - Communicative (e.g. Information campaigns, eco-labelling)
    - Economic (financial incentives and disincentives: e.g. taxes and levies, subsidies)
    - Regulatory (standards etc.)
  - Civil Society initiatives (Bottom-up)
    - Voluntary, grass-roots movements

www.consensus.ie



## Examples

- Strategic planning and target setting
- Monitoring
- Regulatory instruments
- Market-based instruments
- Voluntary agreements
- Infrastructure development
- Education and awareness raising
- Institutional arrangements
- Stakeholder involvement
- Research programmes



www.consensus.ie



## Irish Context

- **Transport:** Increase of greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector: Ireland had highest increase (130%) of any EU state during the period 1990-2003 (EEA)
- **Energy:** Significant demand growth (3,7% per annum average growth since 1990); High import dependency (91%); Low renewable energy (2.7%)
- **Food:** Household food consumption: 30% of environ. impact (OECD 2001)
- **Water:** Daily water consumption per person in Ireland is over 148 litres (Galway: 180); Denmark 116; Infrastructure: Water leakage – up to 55% (cost of €1bn to state pa) Below 10% in Germany and Denmark

www.consensus.ie



## Institutional Challenges

### Challenges:

- No coherent framework for SC
- Fragmented; not one department responsible
- National Consumer Agency (2006): no mandate to take any responsibility for SC agenda
- Sustainable Development Strategy 1997 (SDS) → "...a large and glossy publication, long on generalities but short on specific commitments." (Flynn 2007)
- **Revision planned since 2008; still missing**

www.consensus.ie



## Institutional Challenges

- All-island cooperation
- Policy style: reactive and incremental
- Infrastructure (public transport, water)
- Implementation and Enforcement
- Social norms (e.g. car dependency; skepticism towards public transport)
- Weak local governments (Flynn 2007)

www.consensus.ie



## Policy Style

- Niestroy (2005), “there are no signs of a too rigid “planning” approach in Ireland...in classical planning domains like land use planning the notion of “freedom” still dominates the need for a more regulative or stricter planning approach, which can cause serious problems regarding objectives in the area of sustainable development.”

www.consensus.ie



## Opportunities

- Policy Development since 2008
  - Good practice examples
- Institutional Development:
  - EPA '93, Comhar '99, Nat. Consumer Agency '06
- Green Party in Coalition Government
- Funding in environmental measures
- Energy Efficiency improved 8% last ten years; growth in wind energy (46% 2006)
- Recycling Rates improved

www.consensus.ie



## 'Best' practice examples

- ,Good' versus ,Best' Practice Examples
- Mix of instruments better to tackle Challenge of Sustainable Consumption
- “The effective policy approach will be determined by a range of factors including the issue, existing legal frameworks and the **social** and **cultural** environment.” (OECD 2008)

www.consensus.ie



## Catching up?

### Best Practice International

- Carbon Tax / incentives to buy more efficient cars Europe
- Tax on water use Europe
- Paris 2007: Free bike

### Ireland Policy Introduction

- Carbon Tax 2009; Car tax based on emissions 2008
- Water Charges 2010
- Dublin Bike Scheme 2009

### Local Level / Civil Society:

- Transition Town (Totnes, UK)
- Eco-Village Australia
- LETS Schemes UK
- Green Box schemes

### Local Level / Civil Society:

- **Transition Towns (Kinsale 2005)**
- Eco-Village Tipperary
- Ballinasloe-LETS
- Green Box Leitrim, Galway etc

www.consensus.ie



## Instrument Types

- Strategic Goals:
  - Energy 20% reduction demand by 2020; NSDS 1997, 2002
- Economic instruments:
  - Grants and Subsidies for home insulation
  - Plastic Bag Levy (reduced consumption by 92%; (OECD 2008)
  - Investment in Water Infrastructure, transport (work bike schemes; Travel pass TCD; Dublin bike scheme)
- Regulatory instruments:
  - Building Regulations 2002 (amended 2008)
- Information campaigns and Education:
  - Power of One (energy awareness)
  - Change campaign ([www.change.ie](http://www.change.ie))
  - Green Schools

www.consensus.ie



## Recommendations Comhar

- **Adopt a revised Irish Sustainable Development Strategy 2007: develop measures to provide direction and coherence for all national policy**
- **Adopt suitable governance and implementation institutions and mechanisms (SD cabinet subcommittee)**
- **Subsidiarity principle**
- **Implementing agencies: sufficient resources**

www.consensus.ie



## Good Practice for Ireland?

- **Eco-labelling:** Ireland: no instruments of control specific to environmental claims; no sanctions for misleading claims; low awareness and trust of consumers (Pender 2007)
- **Nordic Countries:** *Nordic Swan* eco-label: multi-country coverage (5 Nordic countries), high product uptake (1 200 products in 60 categories), government certification, and extensive brand awareness among consumers. [www.svanen.nu/Eng/](http://www.svanen.nu/Eng/)

www.consensus.ie



## Good Practice for Ireland?

- **Fragmentation SC over different departments in Ireland**
- **Sweden:** has a stand-alone ministry for sustainable development, with a specific policy area on sustainable production and consumption; development of SCP actions plans

www.consensus.ie



## Design of policy strategies

Essential elements (ASCEE 2009):

- Mix of regulatory and voluntary policy approaches
- Importance of collective action
- Adaptability and flexibility of instruments
- Use of a sound evidence base covering social science data
- Need for an increased consideration of social aspects of sustainability.

www.consensus.ie



## Policy recommendations I

ASCEE 2009:

- **Policy foundation:** Understand sustainable consumption as a **policy field in its own right** and thoroughly consider the policy requirements derived from modern consumption patterns
- **Policy approach:** Take a flexible role in policy formulation and implementation, and **design a multistakeholder based** and sufficiently institutionalised policy

www.consensus.ie



## Policy recommendations II

ASCEE 2009:

- **Policy instruments:** Develop policy instruments with high built-in adaptability (in particular in areas of rapid technological progress) with a sense of community and social feedback, based on an appropriate evidence-base and increasingly integrating issues of social sustainability
- **Policy Documentation:** Systematically assess and monitor the impacts of sustainable consumption policies and create more interactive networks for the dissemination of innovative approaches among EU Member States

www.consensus.ie



## The Need for ConsEnSus

- ConsEnSus: A cross-border household analysis of CONSUMption, ENVIRONMENT and SUStainability in Ireland
- RESEARCH GAP: No data on all-island sustainable consumption behaviours in Irish Context yet
- Largest Irish project on Sustainable Consumption to date (4 years, funded by EPA)
- Collaboration Trinity College Dublin and NUI Galway; interdisciplinary project (geography, sociology, political science)

www.consensus.ie



## Objectives

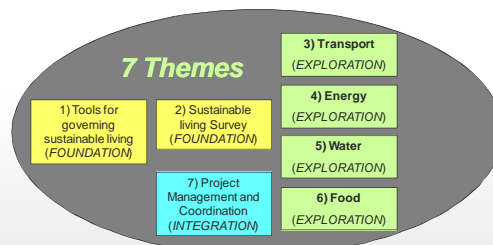
ConsEnSus aims to

...deepen our understandings of the key determinants, motivations and factors that shape consumption behaviours including incentives and barriers, attitudes, situational context and the interaction between them

[www.consensusus.ie](http://www.consensusus.ie)



## ConsEnSus Project: Structure



[www.consensusus.ie](http://www.consensusus.ie)



## Aims of Consensus Project:

- Produce baseline data for Ireland: **transport, energy, water and food**
- Address key issues in sustainable consumption: measurement, evaluation, behavioural analysis, quality of life, governance
- Develop policy recommendations for policy makers and action plans for sustainable lifestyles
- Cooperation with state/non-state organizations
- Establish cross-border research network (SCRN)

[www.consensusus.ie](http://www.consensusus.ie)



[www.consensusus.ie](http://www.consensusus.ie)

[consensus@nuigalway.ie](mailto:consensus@nuigalway.ie)

[Click here to start again](#)

[www.consensusus.ie](http://www.consensusus.ie)

