

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The ConsEnSus (Consumption, Environment and Sustainability) Project is a four-year research project involving collaboration between TCD and NUI, Galway. The ConsEnSus Project is funded by the EPA under the STRIVE programme. This project focuses on four key areas of household consumption: transport, energy, water and food.

As part of the ConsEnSus Project, the Lifestyle Survey was conducted over a ten-month period between June 2010 and April 2011. The aim of this Lifestyle Survey was to gain an understanding of people's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household consumption and sustainable lifestyles. A total of 1,500 households (750 urban based/750 rural based) were surveyed in 30 EDs across Galway City and County Council areas, Derry City Council area, Limavady District Council area, Dublin City Council area and Fingal County Council area.

Further information is available at: www.consensus.ie



Background and Methodology

Consensus Project

The ConsEnSus (Consumption, Environment and Sustainability) Project is a four-year large scale project involving collaboration between Trinity College, Dublin and the National University of Ireland, Galway. This research project is the first of its kind to look at sustainable consumption on the island of Ireland; in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This project focuses on four key areas of household consumption that impact negatively on the environment: transport, energy, water and food. The ConsEnSus Project is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Science, Technology, Research and Innovation for the Environment (STRIVE) programme. This research is exploring how a shift towards more sustainable consumption might be encouraged, measured and governed. Therefore, one of the key outputs of this research will be to make recommendations for local and national programmes concerning sustainable consumption policies.

Lifestyle Survey

The Lifestyle Survey was carried out by researchers in the Geography Department in the National University of Ireland, Galway and Trinity College, Dublin between June 2010 and April 2011. The aim of this survey was to obtain an understanding of people's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household consumption and sustainable lifestyles.

The questionnaire explored respondents' household behaviours in the areas of mobility, food, water and energy use. The questionnaire also examined respondents' attitudes towards the environment, towards environmental responsibility as well as their attitudes towards their perceived levels of environmental control, their perceptions of quality of life, and their understandings of what constitutes a luxury or a necessity in daily life. The questionnaire was piloted extensively over a three-month period to ensure all issues of clarity, timing and formatting were addressed.

Population and sampling

The population for this survey was defined as all adults aged 18 years and over residing on the island of Ireland. Three specific counties were selected for the sampling frame; Derry/Londonderry, Dublin and Galway. A multi-stage cluster sampling technique was utilised to select the population from within these three counties. Using a stratified random sample, a total of 1,500 households were surveyed across the 30 selected Electoral Districts (ED); with a 250 urban, 250 rural divide in each county. These lists of domestic dwellings were obtained through the Geo-directory database in the Republic and the Pointer database in Northern Ireland.

Data collection

The Lifestyle Survey was conducted over a ten-month period between June 2010 and April 2011. Researchers called to the doors of the selected households and conducted the questionnaire face to face. Any eligible person within the selected household was invited to participate in the study.

Ethical considerations

All ethical considerations were considered very carefully before conducting this study. The research proposal was subject to an independent review by the National University of Ireland, Galway's ethics committee. All participation in this study was undertaken on a voluntary basis. All respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the survey at any stage.

Data analysis

A portal tablet computer was utilised to allow participants' responses to be recorded immediately. An Access interface was developed based on a unique coding system for each question. All data was then coded numerically using an Excel spreadsheet. Data was then exported directly onto a corresponding Statistical Packaging Software Systems (SPSS) for statistical analysis.

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Participant profile

A profile of the survey participants can be viewed in the tables and figures below:

Sex of participants

Table 1.1 Participant profile

Profile	Frequency	Percent
Female	878	59%
Male	622	41%

Age categories

Respondents were asked the year they were born. For the purposes of analysis, all respondents were divided into five age groups (see Figure 1.1).

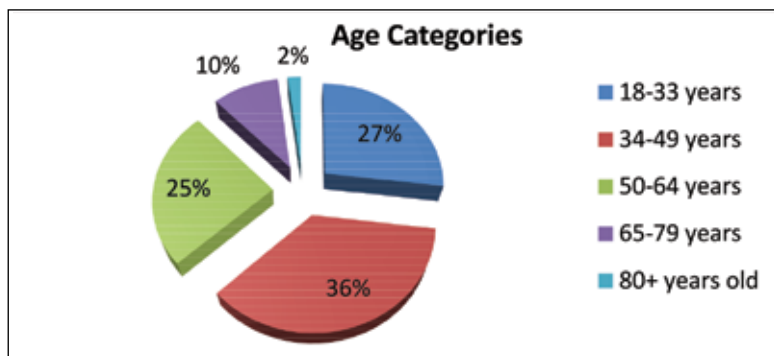


Figure 1.1 Age Categories

Education

Table 1.2 Participant profile – Educational attainment table

Educational Status	Frequency	Percent
Primary level education	66	5%
Second level education	613	41%
Third level education	813	54%

Housing Tenure

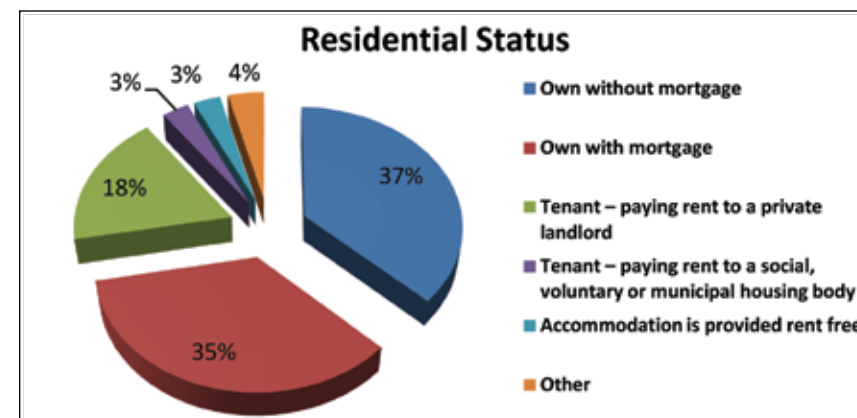


Figure 1.2 Housing Tenure

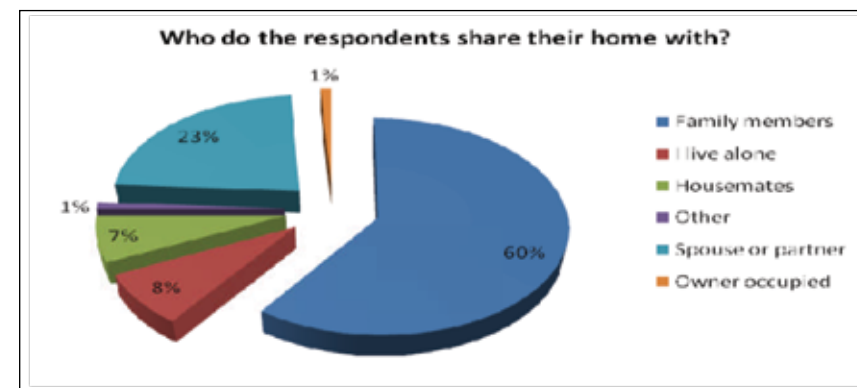


Figure 1.3 House composition

Implications

- This is the most comprehensive survey conducted on sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles to date on the island of Ireland.
- The scale of this study (n=1,500) ensures that the results presented will be accurate and significant.
- This survey is a tool to assess baseline trends in the field of sustainable lifestyles. It is possible to repeat this survey to monitor and assess progress in this important field of sustainability into the future.