

Living the 'Good Life'? A Focus on Sustainable Consumption and Quality of Life: A Cross-Border Case Study from the Island of Ireland.

MARY JO LAVELLE

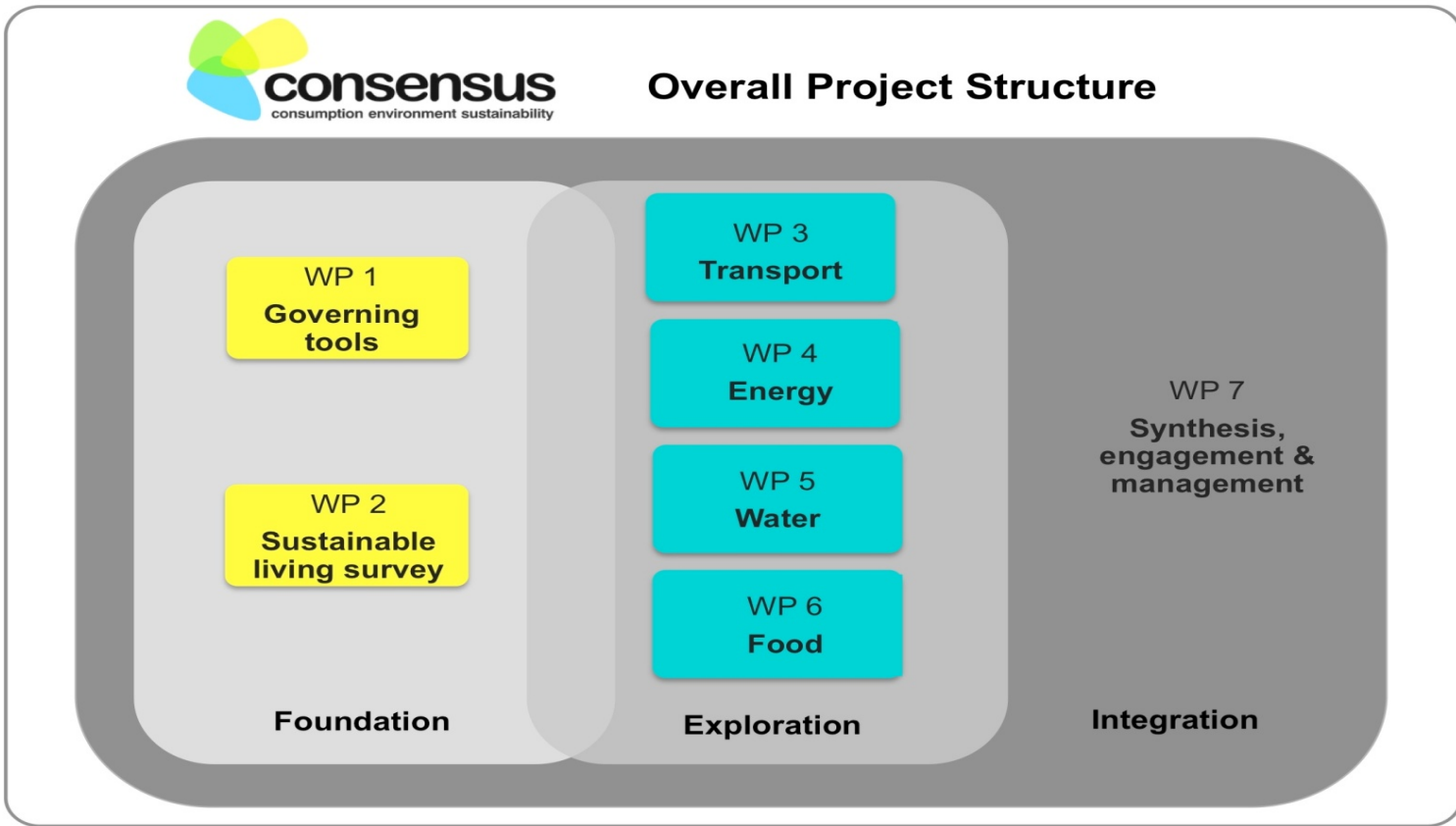
RGS-IBG PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH GROUP
WORKSHOP

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

25-26TH APRIL 2013.



THE CONSENSUS PROJECT: CONSUMPTION, ENVIRONMENT, AND SUSTAINABILITY



PRESENTATION STRUCTURE

- ❑ Challenges for SC in an Irish context
- ❑ Issues of quality of life and consumption
- ❑ Research framework
- ❑ Policy context
- ❑ Methodology
- ❑ Results
 - ❑ Life satisfaction
 - ❑ Quality of life
 - ❑ Impact of economic downturn
- ❑ Conclusions & recommendations



(Source: Irish Times, 2011)

A NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

- Sustainable consumption has emerged as a key area within the sub-discipline of Environmental Geography.
- Current global rates of consumption have been highlighted in terms of their role in driving global environmental change and responses (OECD, 2002)
- Start of the 21st Century: urgent call to examine consumption's role in driving global environmental change and responses.



CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN THE IRISH CONTEXT

○ Ireland:

- ❑ Relatively young population
- ❑ North-South divide: different policy regions
- ❑ The Celtic Tiger era- impact on environment?
- ❑ High import dependency (91%) and low renewable energy.
- ❑ Energy, water and transport have been identified as priority areas for SC (OECD 2009).

○ Energy:

- ❑ Ireland's residential sectors' Total Primary Energy Requirement increased by 31% between 1990 and 2004.
- ❑ Higher energy usage per dwelling and higher CO₂ emissions than the EU averages:
 - Ireland was 31% above the EU average energy usage per dwelling.
 - 36% above the EU-27 average (SEI, 2008).

○ Water Consumption:

- ❑ Ireland – 148 litres per person per day in comparison to Denmark (116 litres).
- ❑ High levels of water leakage; up to 55% in certain areas.... costing the state almost €1bn annually (EPA, 2008).

○ Mobility:

- ❑ Ireland amongst the most car dependent societies in Europe (Gkartzios & Scott, 2007).
- ❑ An increasing reliance on the private motor vehicle as the preferred mode of transport (Clinch et al., 2002).



HOW DOES THIS TRANSLATE INTO THE RESEARCH CONTEXT?

- Household consumption analyses on the international scale (e.g. *Quist et al. 2001; Trentmann 2007; Hobson, 2006; Tudor et al., 2011*).
- Research into sustainable consumption is still in its infancy in an Irish context.
- Current dearth of baseline data on sustainable consumption (SC) and lifestyles; both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- Numerous challenges in exploring SC as a research topic.
- SC is subject to many political and theoretical interpretations (Seyfang, 2003).
- Many discourses of SC are highly contested (Jackson, 2006).
- Internal conflict in SC discourse – is SC simply about consuming less.... consuming more efficiently ...or consuming more responsibly?

Doctoral Research Aims

- Develop and test a survey tool to examine reported attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household consumption and lifestyles.
- Produce national dataset of sustainable consumption attitudes, behaviours and lifestyles.
- Conduct exploratory analysis to establish emerging trends and potential gaps between attitudes and actions in key sectors of transport, water, energy and food consumption.



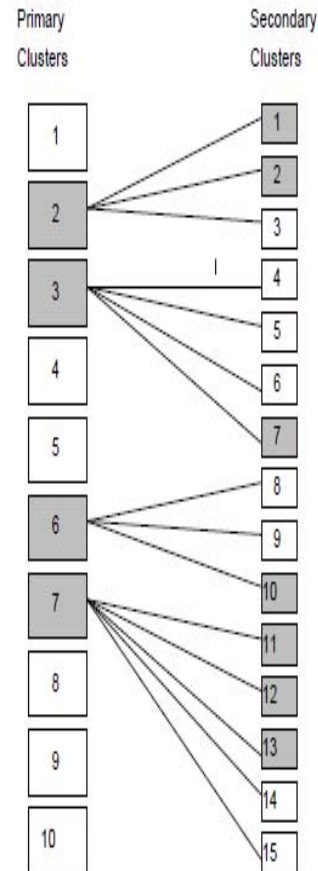
Doctoral Aims Continued..

- Explore economic, social, political and environmental factors influencing household consumption patterns in N.I and R.o.I.
 - Examine previously under-researched correlations between Quality of Life, well being, perceived standards of living, and consumption and lifestyles.
- Undertake segmentation analysis to establish lifestyle groupings to inform the development of a conceptual framework to contextualise social, cultural, environmental and political factors which shape consumption behaviour and lifestyles.

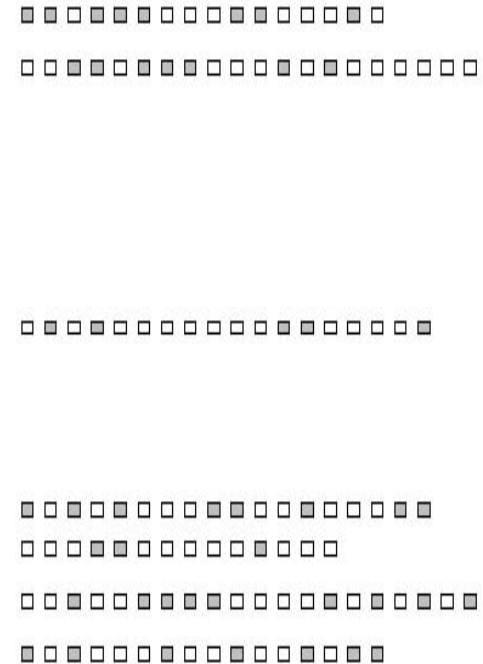


Methodology

- Extensive questionnaire survey
- Data collection - June 2010 - May 2011
- Sampling –
 - 1,500 Households
 - Selected counties: Dublin, Galway & Londonderry
 - Geo-directory (Republic) & Pointer database (Northern Ireland)
 - Multi-cluster sampling
 - 500 households- 250 urban/ 250 rural divide



Simple Random Sampling within Secondary Clusters



(Source: Bryman, 2006)

Public Dissemination of Survey Results

ConsEnSus Lifestyle Survey

www.consensus.ie

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Lavelle & Fahy, 2012

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).

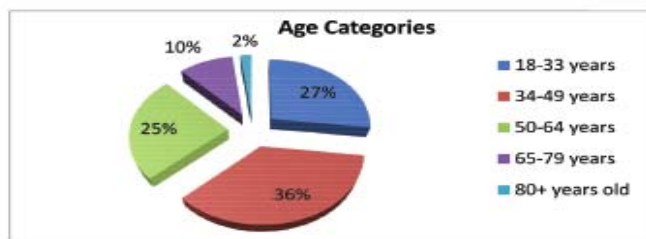


Figure 1.1 Age Categories

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

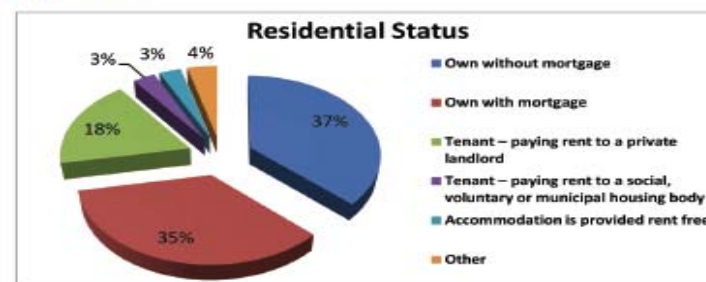


Figure 1.2 Housing Tenure

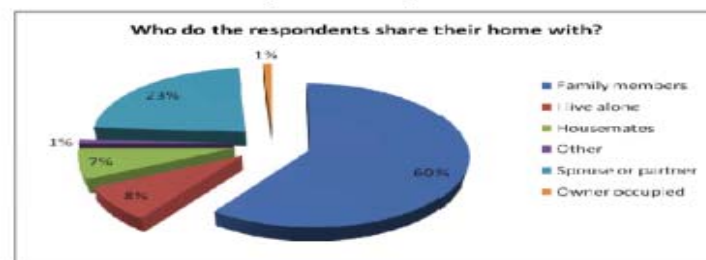


Figure 1.3 House composition

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.

SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES AND QUALITY OF LIFE

- A critical issue ...the relationship between perceptions of Q.o.L & sustainable consumption (*Doran, 2007*).
- Policies need to promote SC in terms of individual's interests:
 - A need to emphasise how sustainable living could improve a person's quality of life (*Doran, 2007; Hinton & Goodman, 2009*)
- Economic growth does not equate to improved Q.o.L or wellbeing (*Doran, 2007; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Lane, 2001; Layard, 2005; Jackson, 2004*)
- SC policies are unlikely to be successful if they detract from an individual's quality of life (*Bell & Morse, 2003*).
- Environmental actions unlikely.....if SC policies impinges too severely on the individual's time, money & comfort (*Stern & Aronson, 1984*).

Criticisms of Current Policy Trajectory and Underlying Assumptions

- Neo-classical & rationalistic worldviews:
 - Current policies are largely based on information provision and market based principles.
- Ecological Modernisation Theory:
 - 'Supply-side initiatives' such as extended producer responsibility, eco-labelling
 - An over-reliance on 'redesigning' or 'greening of products and technologies'.
- Oversimplify human behaviour by assuming that a linear model of behaviour change exists (Barr, 2006; Barr et al., 2005)
- Assumes a limited number of universal characteristics (EPA,2007)
- Based on a limited understanding of human actions, routines and habits (Shove, 2003)
- Internalise the cost of the environmental damage onto the individual themselves; rather than taking into account the wider structural, societal and personal factors (Burgess et al., 2002)



IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR QUALITY OF

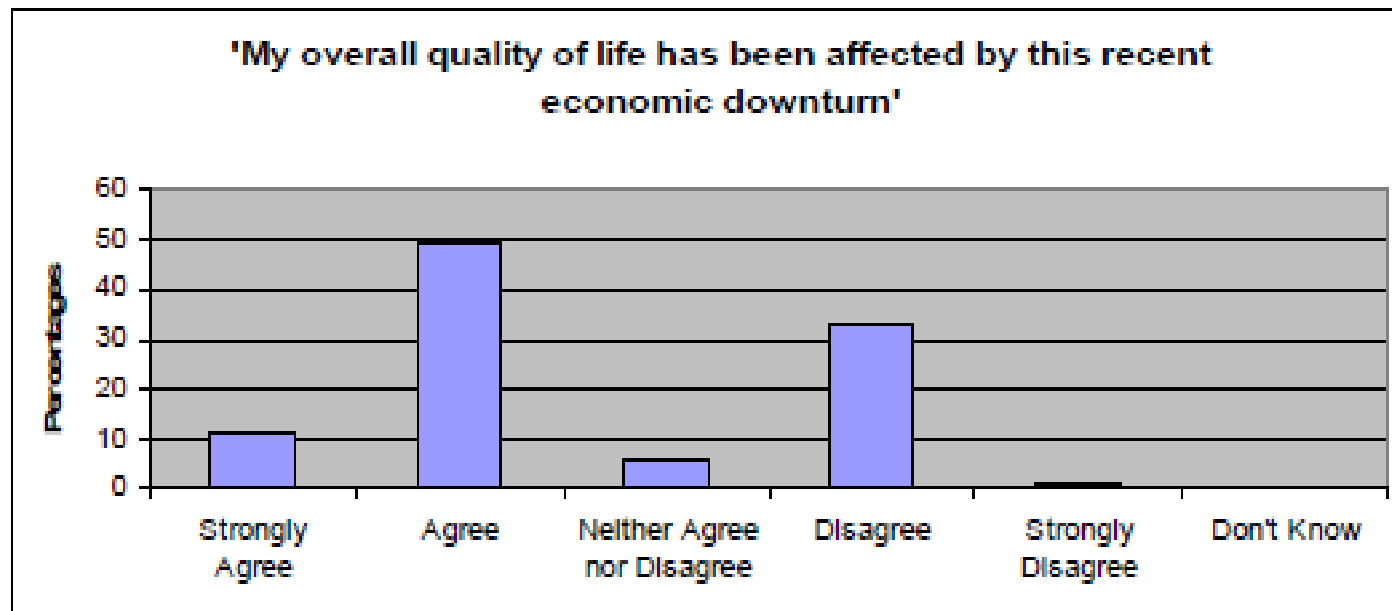
.....

Table 3: What issues do respondents consider as being most important in terms of their quality of life?

Issues	Frequency	Percent
Good health	430	29%
Nice place to live	319	21%
Good family life	234	16%
Good standard of living	169	11%
Good education	157	11%
Job satisfaction	69	5%
Good work-life balance	50	3%
Good Community life/relationships with others	27	2%
Having religious or spiritual beliefs	18	1%
Good social life	16	1%
Other	5	0.3%

IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DOWNTURN ON QUALITY OF LIFE

Figure 2: Participants' response to question 11a: *'My overall quality of life has been affected as a result of this recent economic downturn'*.



IMPACT OF RECENT ECONOMIC DOWNTURN ON QUALITY OF LIFE ACROSS THE VARYING EMPLOYMENT STATUS CATEGORIES

Table 5: Breakdown of respondents into different employment categories who stated that their quality of life had been affected

Employment Status	Frequency who agreed that their quality of life had been impacted by the economic downturn	
Employed	555	67.4%
Unemployed	89	81.7%
Student	66	60.%
Retired	121	47.8%



IMPACT OF RECENT ECONOMIC DOWNTURN ON QUALITY OF LIFE ACROSS THE VARYING AGE COHORTS

Table 6: Breakdown of respondents into different age categories who stated that their quality of life had been affected

<i>Age cohorts</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
18-40 years of age	68.1%	377
41-65 years of age	64.3%	426
66+ years of age	45.8%	65



WHAT ASPECTS OF INDIVIDUALS' QUALITY OF LIFE WERE REPORTEDLY IMPACTED BY THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN?

Table 7: What aspects of the respondents' lives had been impacted?

What has been affected	Frequency	Percent of respondents who concurred that their quality of life had been impacted (n-901)
Ability to heat home	574	63.7%
Ability to take annual holiday abroad	785	87.1%
Ability to buy new car	818	90.7%
Ability to do weekly food shopping	502	55.7%
Ability to socialise with family or friends once a month	542	60.2%

REPORTED WELLBEING

Table 2: Impact of income on respondents' reported level of satisfaction with their life; ranked on a scale ranging from of zero to ten.

Group	Income Categories	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Numbers				
Group 1	€0.00 -€18,999	54	6.87	1.770
Group 2	€19,000- €37,999	211	7.04	1.400
Group 3	€38,000 -€75,999	277	7.45	1.208
Group 4	€76,000 - €113,999	118	7.52	.976
Group 5	€114,000 and above	17	7.88	.697
	Total	677	7.30	1.300

RATIONALE FOR EMPLOYING A LIFESTYLE FRAMEWORK APPROACH QUALITY OF LIFE

- A need for holistic SC policy based on framework approaches (OECD, 2010; Barr et al., 2005; Jackson, 2005)
 - Society consists of segments of different lifestyle groupings behaviour varies according to these specific lifestyle segments or social milieus (Bourdieu 1992; Mackenzie-Mohr).
 - Lifestyle-related, target-group segmentation used to assess the relationship between attitude and environment-related behaviour (Groger et al., 2011).
- Promote SC in terms of individual's self interests (O'Brien, 2008)
 - Sustainable lifestyles could improve a person's quality of life.
- A focus on quality of life may have more cultural salience & elicit intrinsic, meaningful behavioural change (Doran, 2007; Hinton and Goodman, 2010).
- Current international political shift; Germany & UK
 - OECD's motto of 'better policies for better lives'
- Avoid drawing simple conclusions
 - human behaviour is complex and can be impacted by a wide range of different factors.



Thank you!

For further details please contact:

m.lavelle1@nuigalway.ie

