Exploring the existing and emerging trends in domestic consumption behaviour: a case study from Ireland

Author: Mary Jo Lavelle
National University of Ireland, Galway
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Presentation Structure:

- Overview of the Consensus Project
- SC Challenges in an Irish context
- My research aims
- Methodology
- Results:
  - Current consumption trends:
    - Transport, water and energy

(Source: Irish times, 2011)
What is the ConsEnSus Project:

- **ConsEnSus**: Consumption, Environment, Sustainability
- Four year collaborative research project
- National University of Ireland, Galway and Trinity College Dublin
- EPA funded (STRIVE Programme)
- SCRN – Sustainable Consumption Research Network
- Four key areas of household consumption that impact negatively on the environment:
  - Transport
  - Food
  - Energy
  - Water
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:**
  - 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 (Gkartzos & Scott, 2007).
  - An increasing reliance on the private motor vehicle as the preferred mode of transport (Clinch et al., 2002)
Research Context:

- International household consumption studies (see Quist et al., 2001; Trentmann, 2007; Tudor, et al., 2011)

- Sustainable consumption research still in its infancy in Ireland; both North and South of the border

- A lack of baseline data regarding attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles.
My Research Aims:

- To examine the reported attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household consumption and sustainable lifestyles across the island of Ireland.
- To produce the first baseline dataset of attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable consumption; both north and south of the border.
Methodology:

- Quantitative methodology - a cross-sectional research design
- A detailed administered questionnaire survey
- Sampling –
  - 1,500 Households
  - Selected counties: Derry, Dublin & Galway
  - Geo-directory (Republic) & Pointer database (Northern Ireland)
  - Multi-cluster sampling
  - 500 households - 250 Urban/ 250 Rural divide
Existing and Emerging Trends in Domestic Consumption Behaviours:

Transport, Water and Energy Behaviours
Transport Trends:

Distance travelled to work, school or college (one way)

Method of transport used to travel to work / school / college?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 mile</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 miles</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 3 miles</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 miles</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 miles</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 20 miles</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20 miles</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consensus: Consumption Environment Sustainability
Availability of public transport

- 35% of the respondents stated that there was no public transport available for their commute work, school or college (n= 359).
- This gap in public transport provision was more pronounced in rural areas (44%, n=208) compared to urban areas (28%, n=151).

Reported reasons for not using available public transport for this commute:

- Public transport is too restrictive 42% (n= 272)
- I need my car or van for my job 16% (n=108)
- Public transport is too unreliable 11% (n=70)
80% respondents (n=1,198) stated that there was a need to save water!

63% respondents (n=945) stated that they had not reduced their water use in the past month for environmental reasons.

40% of the respondents interviewed (n=597) stated that they DO NOT pay much attention to the amount of water that they use in their homes.

More rural dwellers (61%) reported paying attention to the amount of water they use, in comparison their urban counterparts (53%).
Water Usage:

Do people believe they are entitled to use resources as they wish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derry</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Yes, I have the right to use as much water and energy as I want
- No, I do not have the right to use as much water and energy as I want
Energy efficient appliances:

- 91% of respondents (n=1,365) stated they would be willing to buy more energy efficient appliances.
  - 46% of respondents stated they had purchased an energy efficient appliance in the past five years.
  - Rationale given for purchasing an energy efficient appliance?

Installing insulation:

- Approx one quarter of respondents (23%) installed insulation in their houses in past 5 years.
- Reasons for carrying out this activity were as follows:
  - Only 5% cited ‘solely environmental reasons’.
  - A further 41% stated ‘a mix of environmental and financial reasons’.
  - Over one third reported “financial reasons” 33%
Renewable Energy Suppliers:

- Just over one fifth of respondents (21%) had changed to a renewable energy supplier in the past five years:
  - Almost two thirds of respondents stated “financial reasons” for this (65%).
  - Only 9% reported ‘solely environmental reasons’.

Energy Efficiency Grants:

- Majority of respondents were aware of the government grants and subsidies available
  - Only 5% of respondents reported availing of a grant in past five year to make their home more energy efficient.
93% of the respondents stated that they would be willing to buy products with less packaging; in order to protect the environment?

Over two thirds of the respondents (68%, n=1025) stated that they had not avoided products with excess packaging in the past month for environmental reasons.

More than half of the respondents (51%, n=770) stated that they were aware of energy meters and smart meters.

73% stated that they would be willing to install insulation or smart meters in their homes for environmental reasons.

However less than one quarter had done so in the past 5 years and of these 24%: only 5% cited environmental reasons as their rationale.
**Personal Attitudes:**

**Environmental Concern:**
86% respondents were either “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about environmental issues (n=1289).

**Environmental Responsibility:**
More than half of the sample (58%, n=871) stated that they needed to act in a more environmentally friendly way.

More women (61%) than men (54%) reported that they should behave in a more environmentally friendly way.

More women (85%) in comparison to men (77%) felt that their own personal behaviour could make a difference in the environment.

More women wanted to be seen as environmentally friendly (74%) in comparison to men (62%).

More respondents in the third level education grouping wished to be seen as environmentally friendly (73%) in comparison to those in the secondary level education group (64%) and the primary education group (59%).
Conclusions:

- First baseline dataset on SC produced in an Irish context
  - Further in-depth qualitative analysis—ConsEnSus Members

- Although levels of environmental concern were high (86%), very few respondents stated solely environmental rationale for their behaviours.
  - Personal finances
  - Social desirability
  - Value Action Gap

- No significant differences between the rural-urban dwellers

- Variations across the different policy regions
  - Tailored policies needed to address the motivating factors
Thank you
m.lavelle1@nuigalway.ie
References:

- OECD (2011) Fostering Innovation for Green Growth. OECD