What’s Ireland consuming?

Exploring expressed attitudes and reported behaviours towards the environment, quality of life and consumption on the island of Ireland

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Overview

- Calls for Sustainable Consumption
- Challenges in an Irish context
- Outline of the research

Results
- Overall trends
- Quality of life
- Impact of economic downturn?

Reflections

(Source: Irish Times, 2011)
Calls for Sustainable Consumption

• Troubles with the ‘growth’ economy…
  – negative legacy of the consumerist lifestyle…
  – increasing consumption is not necessarily correlated to increasing wellbeing or quality of life in industrialised countries (Michaelis & Lorek, 2004; Jackson, 2009)
SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: a contradictory concept?

Start of the 21st Century: urgent call to examine consumption's role in driving global environmental change and responses.

Internal conflict in SC debates – is SC simply about consuming less? consuming more efficiently ?…or consuming more responsibly?
WE HELP THE ENVIRONMENT BY CONSUMING LESS.

WE HELP THE ENVIRONMENT BY CONSUMING LOTS OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SAFE PRODUCTS!
CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN THE IRISH CONTEXT:

Energy:
- High import dependency and relatively low renewable 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).

Mobility:
- Ireland amongst the most car dependent societies in Europe (Gkartzios & Scott, 2007).
Water Consumption:

- Ireland – 148 litres per person per day in comparison to Denmark (116 litres).

- Infrastructure: High levels of water leakage; up to 55% in certain areas, costing the state almost €1bn annually. Below 10% in Germany and Denmark (EPA, 2008)

Food Waste:

Recent reports estimate that wasted food costs each Irish household approximately €700 a year (EPA 2011)
Creating CONSENSUS

• The CONSENSUS Project: Consumption, Environment, Sustainability
• Seven-year collaborative research project
• National University of Ireland, Galway and Trinity College Dublin
• EPA-funded (STRIVE programme)
• Four key areas of household consumption that impact negatively on the environment:

  - Transport
  - Energy
  - Water
  - Food
Consensus Overview

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdmxaUYp01I
Aim: Explore Trends in Attitudes and Behaviours

• Behaviours are influenced by a range of factors:
  – Internal variables
    • Knowledge
    • Motivation to act
  – External variables
    • Socio economic factors
    • Living circumstances
    • Infrastructure
Conducting the Research

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

(Source: Bryman, 2006)
Info-graphics on Key Findings

• [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iRLHMgQ2HU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iRLHMgQ2HU)
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; 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).
IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR QUALITY OF LIFE:

Most important thing for an individual's quality of life

- Good health
- Nice place to live
- Good family life
- Good standard of living
- Good education
- Job satisfaction
- Good work-life balance
- Having religious or spiritual beliefs
- Good Community life/relationships
- Other
Reported 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’.
• No differences noted across the genders; in terms of whether or not their quality of life had been affected by the economic downturn.
• Variations were found to exist in terms of participants’ rural or urban residential locations and their agreement with this statement.
• Homeowners (64%), in comparison to renters (65%) and those whose accommodation was provided rent-free (68%), were less likely to report that their quality of life had been affected.
• Differences were noted between respondents in the different age categories and their agreement with this statement.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age cohorts</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-40 years of age</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-65 years of age</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66+ years of age</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT ASPECTS OF INDIVIDUALS’ QUALITY OF LIFE WERE IMPACTED?

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

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

• Avoid drawing simple conclusions … human behaviour is complex and can be impacted by a wide range of different factors.
  – External and Internal factors are important

• Crisis situations: opportunity or loss?

• A need for holistic SC policy based on framework approaches (OECD, 2010; Barr et al., 2005; Jackson, 2005).

• A focus on quality of life may have more cultural salience …. elicit intrinsic, meaningful behavioural change (Doran, 2007; Hinton and Goodman, 2010).

• Supportive structures
WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE RADICAL CHANGE

Consensus is examining innovative actions that society, government and business can take to achieve sustainable household consumption.

see

www.consensus.ie