



May 2011 Newsletter

**Dear SCORAI,**

This issue brings a report of the 2nd SCORAI Workshop that was held in Princeton, NJ on April 14-16. I am also delighted to introduce Emily Huddart Kennedy who has assumed the editorship of the SCORAI newsletter. Welcome Emily! Please feel free to send her newsworthy announcements and other items. The deadline for the submission of material is the 25th of each month. Emily will be working hard to get each issue of the newsletter out for the early part of each month.

Maurie Cohen

## **2nd SCORAI Workshop, Princeton, NJ, April 14-16, 2011**

The second SCORAI workshop with the theme "Socio-Technical Transitions, Social Practices, and the New Economics: Meeting the Challenges of a Constrained World" was a great success. Forty scholars and practitioners attended the workshop and participants have the pleasure of digging into a total of twenty papers that were presented for discussion. The aim of the workshop was twofold: (1) to develop intellectual bridges between socio-technical transitions, the theory of practice, and the new economics and (2) to launch a dialogue among academics, practitioners, and policy makers on the issue of sustainable consumption.

The paper abstracts and participant biographies will soon be published on the SCORAI website and a book is in the works, to be edited by Maurie Cohen, Halina Brown, and Philip Vergragt. What follows are some impressions of the workshop based on my memories and notes. I invite all participants to contribute with their own observations, and submit them on the listserve.

The packed workshop had eight sessions in total: four on each day. Halina Brown opened the workshop by illustrating the three theories through the lens of the passive housing case: passive houses can be conceptualized as a socio-technical niche, but they may also influence the social practices of people living in them and they may have effects

### **In This Issue**

Second SCORAI Workshop  
Survey of Voluntary Simplifiers  
Special Issue:  
International Journal of Consumer Studies  
New Publications by SCORAI Members and Friends  
Upcoming Conferences  
New SCORAI Affiliates

### **Executive Board**



**Jeffrey Barber**  
Integrative Strategies Forum

**Halina Brown**  
Clark University

**Maurie Cohen**  
New Jersey Institute of Technology

**John Stutz**  
Tellus Institute

**Philip Vergragt**  
Tellus Institute and Clark University

### **Quick Links**

SCORAI.org  
Subscribe to Listserv  
Subscribe to eNewsletters

on the wider economy. She also drew from participant papers to introduce a fourth perspective: grassroots social movements.



Discussions on the first day of the workshop centered on issues of power, the necessity for revolutionary (vs. evolutionary) change, growth and capitalism, the relative importance of values change versus behavior change, and the constraining effects of the idea of normalcy.

On the evening of the first day of presentations, Chef Gary Giberson gave a presentation about his company, SustainableFare, describing how he was able to "green" the supply chain of food provisioning for a private school in the Princeton area.

Juliet Schor opened the second day with her keynote address on the shift to a sustainable economy. Her presentation focused on the attractiveness of shortening working hours. She showed staggering figures of the rise in individual consumption in recent history. The ensuing discussion addressed topics as diverse as globalization, the need for a political movement, and Schor's notion of a "postindustrial peasant model."

Discussions from the remainder of the second day brought up issues from the first day and added an additional dimension of social change: asking how it occurs, where it occurs, and, as Maurie pointed out, the fact that social change (towards low household consumption) did occur rapidly during World War II.

The workshop showed convincingly that the four research perspectives (socio-technical transitions, theories of practice, new economics, and theories of social movements) add depth of understanding to our understanding of the stability of consumption patterns and the possibilities for change. Socio-technical transitions and theories of practice see change as inherently incremental; social movements like transition towns could accelerate change, but not dramatically. Revolutionary change could happen if we conceptualize the entire socio-technical-economic-political-cultural-ecological system as non-linear, with non-linear feedback loops and tipping points, where relatively small impacts might precipitate deep changes. Deep change thus could be triggered by major events, and/or by a precipitation of events. The role of the government was deeply contested throughout the workshop.

There was some consensus that *the new economics* might be better conceptualized as the new *political* economics, as this terminology would embed not only the limitations imposed by the ecosphere, but also human aspirations, power relations and inequalities. It thus represents an alternative set of values, including the values of shorter working hours and self-provisioning. Leisure time is however not by definition more sustainable.

For policy makers, there were no easy messages. It was clear that the rational actor model is not a good starting point for developing policies. The role of framing is key: consumer-citizens need to relate on an emotional level to policy messages.

To sum up, the framing of the workshop led to interesting discussions and insights, and some bridging between the four perspectives was reached. However, the workshop was overly theoretical, and bridges to social practices and policies could not easily be made. The empirical contributions to the workshop were quite interesting, ranging from urban living to understanding sustainability. In a subsequent workshop we will actively seek to bridge the gap between theories and practice.

The workshop was financially supported by the Tellus Institute, the Netherland-America Foundation, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, ProQuest, and an anonymous donor. We would like to acknowledge their generosity.

Submitted by Philip Vergragt

## **Voluntary Simplifiers Wanted to Participate in Survey**

If you live a "simple" lifestyle in one way or another, The Simplicity Institute needs your help!

The Simplicity Institute is an organization dedicated to research and policy analysis around the topic of simple living, downshifting, and similar lifestyles. This research is profoundly important as it touches the core of global problems such as climate change, over-consumption, work-life balance and a host of other social and ecological issues.

The Simplicity Institute's current research project is focused on people who have chosen a "simpler" lifestyle, including changes such as reduced or restrained income, reduced consumption or reduced working hours.

If this sounds like you, then you are part of the most promising social movement on the planet. Learning more about people like you is therefore extremely important, so if you can spare four minutes to answer some quick questions then please do! As an added incentive, if you participate you'll go into the draw to win an exciting book package on the topic of "simple living."

To learn more and help build a better future, click below:

<http://simplicityinstitute.org/phpO/fillsurvey.php?sid=2>.

## **Special Issue of the International Journal of Consumer Studies**

The special issue focuses on "Household Technology and Sustainability" and was published by the the International Journal of Consumer Studies in March 2011 in advance of the Fifth International Consumer Sciences Research Conference. For more information please go to:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijc.2011.35.issue-2/issuetoc>.

## **New Publications by SCORAI Members and Friends**

The Tellus Institute is pleased to announce publication of [Beyond the Growth Paradigm: Creating a Unified Progressive Politics](#)" by James Gustave Speth. The report is the seventh in the series of occasional papers, GTI Perspectives on Critical Issues.

## **Upcoming Conferences & Workshops**

17th Annual International Sustainable Development Research Conference, May 8-10, 2011, The Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York City.

<http://www.isdrc17.ei.columbia.edu>

Living Sustainably: Values, Policies, and Practices, June 15, 2011. To register please email [resolveconference@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:resolveconference@surrey.ac.uk) before May 27, 2011.

Third Biennial Transformative Consumer Research Conference, June 24-26, 2011, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA

<http://www.baylor.edu/tcr>

United States Society for Ecological Economics Conference (Building the Green Economy), June 26-29, 2011, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA.

<https://www.msu.edu/~ussee>

Beyond Green: Alternatives Assessment Sustainability Action Summer Institute, June 27-29, 2011. For further information about the Sustainability Action Summer Institute, please email [sasi@uml.edu](mailto:sasi@uml.edu).

Fifth International Consumer Sciences Research Conference (Consumer Behaviour for a Sustainable Future), July 18-20, 2011, Bonn, Germany <http://www.consumer11.org>

International Conference on Sustainable Consumption: Towards Action and Impact, November 6-8, 2011, Hamburg, Germany. Abstract submission deadline: May 10, 2011.

<http://www.sustainableconsumption2011.org>

Third German Environmental Sociology Summit, Theme:

Innovation and Sustainability: Beyond Technology, November 16-18, 2011 Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, Frankfurt, Germany.

<http://www.gesellschaftswissenschaften.unifrankfurt.de/gess>

## **New SCORAI Affiliates**

SCORAI welcomes the following new participants to the network during the month of February. Total membership is currently 246 people.

Kathy Araújo (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)  
Chiung Chang (Maastricht University)  
Steve Lang  
Lazri DiSalvo  
Narberhaus, Michael (WWF-UK)  
Roling, Sandra  
Burcu Tuncer, Wuppertal Institute  
Philippa Usher (University of Leeds)  
Ashwani Vasishth (Ramapo College)  
Carolyn Webb (Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy)  
Dan Welch (University of Manchester)  
Bobby Wengronowitz  
James Wilcox (University of Vermont)  
Lucia Reisch (Copenhagen Business School)  
Sara Wysocki (City of Seattle)  
Carfagna, L. B.  
Kerul Kassel, Kerul (New Leaf Systems)  
Adam Christensen  
Folke Ölander, Folke (Aarhus University)  
Schoolman, Ethan (University of Michigan)

### **[Forward email](#)**



Try it FREE today.

This email was sent to [mcohen@adm.njit.edu](mailto:mcohen@adm.njit.edu) by [mcohen@adm.njit.edu](mailto:mcohen@adm.njit.edu) | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) | c/o Tellus Institute | 11 Arlington Street | Boston | NJ | 02116