



**Special session: sustainable consumption teaching
December 8, 2014, University of Lausanne**

Presentation: overview of benchmarking exercise by Marlyne Sahakian and Sophie Swaton (please email marlyne.sahakian@unil.ch to request a copy of the presentation).

Presentations and Discussions:

1. Prof Victoria Victoria W. Thoresen, PERL Project Manager:

- 140 universities in 50 countries around the world are involved in teaching around citizenship, consumption and lifestyles, building on the UN program for Education for Sustainable Consumption (ESC).
- (www.unep.org/resourceefficiency/Home/Society/EducationLifestylesYouth/EducationforSustainableConsumptionESC/tabid/101302/Default.aspx).
- Based on these experience, one main learning is that it doesn't work to start with 'the problem' when it comes to teaching about sustainability. A report that considers sustainable lifestyles around the world draws the main conclusion that you have to look at the value base – what motivates people towards more sustainable consumption.
- The UN 'Measuring what matters' program is about engaging students and teachers to prioritize what matters to people, through forms of social learning and value-based indicators (<http://measurewhatmatters.info/the-project/>).
- Active learning, based on images and objects, seems to be effective, in that this helps students reflect and evaluate on questions related to sustainability. An emphasis is placed on how to relate these questions to personal lifestyles.
- Because people define interdisciplinarity differently, the approach has been to get groups to define different approaches to sustainability together.
- For example at the level of university staff, one goal could be to enter into a detailed discussion around shared values. That being said, you can't identify personal values without reflecting on the broader systems. Systems thinking is necessary.

Discussion:

- Regarding questions raised from participants on cross cultural differences, the teaching methods promoted by PERL are based on participatory sessions at the level of countries / cities that define their own approaches, which makes the methods vary in different contexts.
- Regarding questions on the results of teaching sustainable consumption, the discussion went in two directions: the need to establish better indicators for measuring the impact of teaching; and recognizing that we will never be sure of outcomes and impact.
- Reference was made to the Parker Palmer book, The Courage to Teach. <http://www.couragerenewal.org/courage-to-teach/>

2. Prof Dr Michael Maniates, Professor of Social Sciences, Head of Studies, Yale-NUS College

- The course presented as part of this benchmark is based on a course that was taught at Oakland and will also be part of the Yale/NUS (Singapore) curriculum in the coming years. It was also taught as part of the Semester at Sea program.
- The goal of teaching sustainable consumption is to have a small impact on many, and a big impact on few.
- Students are taught how not to be reactionary and selfish; the goal is not to learn how to canoe in still waters but rather how to white water raft.
- Teaching sustainable consumption usually has a four-part structure:
 1. To gain a historical understanding of the rise of consumer culture. That consumer culture is not normal, natural, but rather engineered by certain forces.
 2. To recognize the cost/benefits of global consumerism.
 3. To understand the rise of sustainable consumption as a concept, the emphasis on technological solutions, the question of power.
 4. To recognize the politics of guilt; the limits of sustainable consumption as an individual action agenda; the chronic (over) focus on the individual.
- Students are currently involved in a survey (5,000 participants) on theories of social change. How people understand the possibilities for social change. The naïve focus on individual actions, the politics of guilt. The idea that we need a crisis to change. Preliminary results: 70% believe in small acts of consumption.
- Currently working on a new book: *The Maze or the Mouse*.
- Perhaps only 5-10% of all students will be critical enough to incite social change (versus the perspective that there should be a broad-scale change in values).
- Different social change theories might include diffusion theory, the genealogy of ideas, the moral-practice gap (see the work of Saul David Alinsky).
Discussion:
- The need for more research on social change.

3. Prof Sylvia Lorek (via Skype), SERI, Sustainable Europe Research Institute Germany

- Consider the Baltic University program as one platform for disseminating information about sustainable consumption teaching. See <http://www.balticuniv.uu.se/sustainabledevelopmentcourse>.
- Also commented on her use of the 'The Parts and The Whole: A Holistic Approach to Environmental and Sustainability Education' materials available via SWEDESDE. See <http://www.swedesd.se/publications>.

4. Prof Halina Brown, Clark University

- Using the IPAT formula as a way to structure course content
- Consider why we consume, including different theoretical approaches from psychology, social practice theory, technology to economic approaches.

- Consider agents of change, or the whole of policy interventions, taxes and efficiencies, the role of business, the question of 'growth'.
- Students are also engaged in writing scenarios for the good life, based on a smaller ecological footprint. Students become very creative in this process, envisioning future scenarios.
- But the question remains for some students: what kind of jobs would this teaching matter translate into? In some cases, they are learning soft skills.

5. Prof Dr Maria Csutora, Associate professor, Corvinus University of Budapest

- The notion of using marketing to decrease consumption is not possible.
- For some students, reducing consumption in certain areas is not conceivable; what you can do is look at different practices around the world and see what is acceptable to them.
- Consumption patterns can be culturally embedded – culture can change, but slowly.
- DESIS – a design network that is also a good source of information for teaching. See: <http://www.desis-network.org/>

6. Dr Antonietta Di Giulio, Senior researcher, Universität Basel

- The goal of the teaching training program is not to change the world nor to change behaviour, but rather to acknowledge the complexity of issues - for whatever context they are teaching in.
- The goal is to link different perspectives and avoid uni-dimensional approaches.
- The course is about critical thinking and questioning, where the questions are more important than the answers. About a third of the course is about developing questions and relating perspectives. Over the course of this exercise, questions can change several times.
- Students in this teacher training program can choose their own topics and do research in different academic fields, using different approaches.
- One challenge is to not give in to bad questions; the second is to not take over and help craft the question.
- Intensive coaching is needed and so this type of course can have a maximum of 60 students.
- Students are invited to assess each other's work in a peer review exercise. They must explain the merits of certain questions.

7. Dr Frances Fahy, Lecturer, NUI, Galway, Ireland

- The use of field trips as a way to understand the contradictions between local and organic, for example, when it comes to sustainable food.
- The use of a reflective diary kept over 12 months, with students presented with a new topic every week and asked to reflect on the topic in relation to their own lives.
- The use of blackboard technology, an online platform for sharing information and engaging in discussions.
- Camtasia software: podcast narration over powerpoint.

General discussion:

About sharing information on SC teaching:

- The issue of competition: will universities allow that their courses be shared freely online?
- The use of the SCP clearinghouse platform, established by UNEP; where much material already exists and more could be added to,
- Also UNESCO's online platform, where at least 70-90 people are discussing SC teaching around the world.
- SCORAI website could also be a platform for housing materials related to teaching SC, with links to the UN networks.
- An e-book could help serve as a tool for sustainable consumption teaching. This would serve to further define the field. This could take the form of an anthology. Although for Bachelor level teaching, a more basic text book could also be useful.
- Material could also be available online, such as existing course curriculum or syllabi. In a more developed stage, an online course could be offered, or at least the materials necessary to develop a course; a series of modules.
- A common list of references could also be created, based on the materials collected through this benchmarking exercise.

About the value of an effort towards supporting SC teaching:

- General consensus that we should continue these discussions, as this is the first time the SCORAI community takes the time to really consider how to support sustainable consumption teaching.
- This workshop was only the start of what could be a more developed discussion / effort.
- As the University of Lausanne has a (small) three-year grant to support such an effort, in light of a new Masters program on sustainability currently being developed, we feel that we can continue taking a lead in advancing these discussions.

Next steps:

- Share benchmarking exercise and notes with all those who participated in the workshop and the survey.
- Determine whether information (i.e., reference list, syllabus, etc.) can be shared online (open to all) or within this group, by following up with participants in the survey.
- Start to develop common materials, starting with a common set of references. This could also involve pulling together a series of teaching modules, depending on interest from participants.
- Use the opportunity to further discuss sustainable consumption teaching at forthcoming SCORAI events.