

## Sustainable consumption and social change, 6 ECTS

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Monday 8:30am-10am, Uni-Mail, MR040

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Updated on November 10, 2019

*Please note: the course starts on September 23, 2019 to accommodate the IHDS Master program schedule. Class will be recorded via Media Server, all supporting documents are available on Moodle, and the main lecture will start at 8h30 on Mondays with no break. The program below may change, in relation to the total number of students registered.*

### Course overview:

In the past, efforts towards “sustainable development” have focused primarily on production processes, or the realm of engineers, designers, and environmental scientists, with “consumers” remaining a black box of complexity for many. Sociology has much to contribute to an understanding of consumer culture and social practices, yet there are competing understandings of *why* and *in what way* people consume – highlighting the structure-actor dichotomy in social sciences. What’s more, proposed measures for transitions or transformations to more sustainable forms of consumption are also contested, involving different theories of social change and innovation. This course aims to provide students with the tools necessary for understanding (un)sustainable consumption as a complex and multi-disciplinary area of research and practice, involving competing theories of consumption and social change. Students will gain an overview of the main issues related to consumption and sustainability, including the historical roots of a consumer culture, and the environmental and social consequences of current consumption patterns. Thematic areas will be explored in depth, including food consumption and waste, mobility and urban development, and household energy consumption, among others. Examples from emerging economies will be provided. Finally, students will engage in debates and group work, towards applying the different theoretical frameworks, as well as explore visions of the future towards designing for social change.

### Teaching objectives:

Provide students with:

- 1) **The conceptual tools necessary for analysing and designing “sustainable consumption” initiatives** – across domains, in varying cultural contexts, and at different scales – towards transdisciplinary research and action.
- 2) **Knowledge around domains related to sustainable consumption**, and how they interrelate, including: sustainable lifestyles and social change, ethical consumption, food consumption and waste, household energy consumption, mobility, and urban development.

## Student evaluation:

Continuous evaluations involving group work and presentations:

**1) Workshop 1 and workshop 2 (40%):** reflexive exercise, article summaries and participation (20%) in two workshops, one on food consumption and the second on mobility.

**2) Group written report (50%): developing a social change project/idea towards sustainable consumption,** analysing your chosen topic through a conceptual framework, proposing further opportunities for social change in relation to urban planning and policy.

**3) Participation in class and guest lectures (10%):** attendance and active participation in the Monday class (up to two absences are allowed per semester); attendance and participation in two lectures by invited guests (2x).

For those students who do not receive the minimal grade required for passing this course but who participated in the continuous evaluation, a second and individual paper (4-5,000 words including references and notes) will be required during the summer exam period.

## Course plan

<b>16 September</b>	<b>Tronc commun (no class)</b>
<b>23 September</b>	<b>1. Introduction: Why sustainable consumption?</b>  Environmental and social dimensions of global consumption patterns. Introducing the IPAT formula, rebound effects, system boundaries, the question of inequalities, and how this plays out in different contexts and at varying scales.  Historical overview of “sustainable consumption” at the international policy / institutional level, implications for regional / national development and urban planning. Introducing sustainable wellbeing and Doughnut Economics.  <i>Introduction to course objective, content and evaluation.</i>
<b>I. Apprehending consumption and social change: competing theories</b>	
<b>30 September</b>	<b>2. Apprehending consumption part I:</b> <b>Consumption is meaningful VS Production systems create meaning</b>  The emergence of the consumer society; theories of production (Frankfurt school, post-Fordism, planned obsolescence, McDonalidization); cultural theories of consumption (symbolic value of consumption, conspicuous consumption, the “new consumers”).

<p><b>7 October</b></p>	<p><b>3. Apprehending consumption part II: Social practices shape consumption VS Individuals make choices</b></p> <p>Theories of rational choice, individualization of responsibility, cognitive biases, the value-action gap; theories of social practice (material, social and individual dimensions of consumption), applied to different domains; policy implications of different approaches.</p> <p><i>Begin individual work on describing food provisioning practices.</i></p>
<p><b>8 October (Tuesday)</b></p>	<p><b>Brown bag talk at lunch: 18h15</b></p> <p><b>Dr Katia Vladimirova, University of Geneva</b></p> <p><b>"Sustainable Fashion, Social Transformation and the Changing Consumption and Production Patterns"</b></p> <p><b>Mandatory attendance</b></p>
<p><b>14 October</b></p>	<p><b>4. Apprehending social change:</b></p> <p><b>Multi-level system transitions VS Shifting social practices</b></p> <p>Understanding change through socio-technical systems in transition, including the multi-level perspective; example of agriculture production and consumption in Switzerland and elsewhere; understanding change through social practice theories, notion of breaking down or enforcing elements of a practice (policies, norms, material infrastructure, technologies, people).</p> <p><i>Work in groups of 3-4 students (maximum) to find differences and commonalities in food provisioning practices. Provide a summary document of main findings to be shared with assistants by October 17 6pm, at the workshop October 21.</i></p>
<p><b>21 October</b></p>	<p><b>5. Workshop 1: Applying the concepts</b></p> <p><b>The class will be divided into two groups, and the workshop will take place in two rooms and in parallel: MR040 with Rebecca, and M1193 with Katia.</b></p> <p><b>Presentation of group work and discussion: provisioning food, what opportunities for urban development and public policies?</b></p> <p>By group, present the differences and similarities between food provisioning practices. Working in groups, apply social practice approaches towards analysing "sustainable consumption and social change" in relation to the practice of "preparing a meal".</p> <p><b>Homework assignment:</b> sent by email to assistants by October 20, 8pm. Individual work describing practices and article summary.</p>

	Part of the workshop will be about discussing your practices by groups, based on the homework, and summarizing the commonalities and differences. For the second part of the workshop, we will introduce 3-4 social innovations in relation to food and ask students to discuss the impacts of such changes in small groups, and in relation to the three elements of a practice.
<b>28 October</b>	<p><b>6. Apprehending social change:</b></p> <p><b>Participative methods VS Nudging consumers</b></p> <p>Introduction to participative methods of research and action (Living Lab approaches, as well as visioning and back-casting); contrasted to nudge theory, consumer choice editing, and overview of how these two approaches are playing out in practice and implications for the policy arena.</p> <p><i>Students propose topics for final group report and begin to form groups; topics can be suggested by the students but must involve a form of social innovation or change, a new and novel way of doing, that involves forms of consumption and/or citizen-based activism.</i></p>
<b>4 November</b>	<b>Reading week, no classes. Please see recommended reading below.</b>
<p><b>II. Deep dive into “sustainable consumption” domains</b></p> <p>Each class begins with: why is this relevant in relation to sustainable consumption? Considering environmental and social impacts, as well as policy relevance.</p>	
<b>11 November</b>	<p><b>7. Economics and wellbeing:</b></p> <p>Introduction to different economic types and paradigms, towards more sustainable forms of consumption: greenwashing and share-washing, new economy initiatives, performance-based economy, sharing economy. Discussion around notion of sustainable wellbeing, and sufficiency.</p> <p><i>Students confirm « social change » topics and conceptual framework for final group report this week.</i></p>
<b>18 November</b>	<p><b>8. Ethical consumption:</b></p> <p>A historical perspective, from the first cooperatives, to fair trade initiatives, slow food and other social movements, sustainable procurement policies, and the limits of product labelling. Examples from around the world.</p> <p><i>Students submit <u>an outline</u> of the final written report, including: social change topic and problems to be addressed; key research question(s); and selected conceptual approach. Private meetings scheduled to provide feedback to groups, as needed.</i></p>
<b>25 November</b>	<b>9. Household energy consumption:</b>

	<p>Historical perspective, energy poverty, socio-technical interface, links to everyday practices, rebound effects, efficiency vs sufficiency, examples of energy initiatives at the household level (transition towns, carbon conversations, etc.); managing the micro-climate (example of air-conditioning in the global South).</p>
<p><b>26 November</b></p>	<p><b>Nov 26 Brown bag talk: 18h15-20h00, room M S160</b></p> <p><b>Prof Alison Browne, Manchester University</b></p> <p><b>“Situating the significance of everyday life within debates on Chinese urbanisms and environmental pollution: A research agenda”</b></p> <p><b>Mandatory attendance</b></p>
<p><b>2 December</b></p>	<p><b>10. Food consumption and waste:</b></p> <p>Food as cultural, the significance of taste, systems of provision, material dimension of food consumption, food loss vs. food waste, different forms of food production and distribution (from organic to community supported agriculture); examples from Switzerland, the Philippines and India.</p>
<p><b>9 December</b></p>	<p><b>11. Urban development and mobility:</b></p> <p>Linking domains (from integrated multi-modal mobility, to the world of work, to household consumption); transitions and ruptures towards sustainable mobility.</p> <p>Summary of conceptual approaches covered in class, though the example of mobility.</p> <p><i>Discussion in preparation for Workshop 2.</i></p>
<p><b>Workshop 2: designing more sustainable futures</b></p>	
<p><b>16 December (no class)</b></p> <p><b>18 December</b></p> <p><b>14h00-1730 (RD)</b></p> <p><b>Campus Biotech at Sécheron</b></p>	<p><b>12. Workshop 2: Visions of the future towards sustainable consumption practices</b></p> <p>Students will come to the workshop with "mapping mobility practices" homework prepared and sent to me in advance of the workshop, by email. Please plan 2-3 hours to complete the worksheets and comment on the required reading. The workshop will consist of sharing these mapping exercises together, and agreeing on a handful of mobility-related policy interventions or “social innovations”. We will then split into groups and test the possible impacts of the policy through Futures Wheel techniques, integrating different elements of practices. Time permitting, we will engage either in role playing exercises or World Café format discussions to further elaborate these ideas.</p> <p><i>Homework delivered on mobility practices due December 16 by 6pm.</i></p> <p><i>Final group written reports due January 13 by 6pm.</i></p>

## Select Bibliography

(Books for the reading week are indicated in bold as *recommended reading* below)

- Alkon, A. H. and J. Guthman (2017). The new food activism: opposition, cooperation, and collective action. Oakland, California, University of California Press.
- Balsiger P., J. Lorenzini and M. Sahakian (2019 first online) How Do Ordinary Swiss People Represent and Engage with Environmental Issues? Grappling with Cultural Repertoires. *Sociological Perspectives*.
- Baudrillard, J. (1969). "La genèse idéologique des besoins." *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 47: 45-68.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). La distinction critique sociale du jugement. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit.
- Cohen, M. J., et al., Eds. (2017). Social Change and the Coming of Post-Consumer Society: Theoretical Advances and Policy Implications. Oxon, New York, Routledge.
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- Dubuisson-Quellier, S. (2013). Ethical Consumption. Nova Scotia, Canada: Fernwood Publishing. Available in English, French and Chinese, 消费者在行动, *La consommation engagée*, Collection la bibliothèque du Citoyen, Pékin.**
- Dubuisson-Quellier, S., & Plessz, M. (2013). La théorie des pratiques: Quels apports pour l'étude sociologique de la consommation ? *Sociologie*, 4(4).
- Ekström, K. M. and K. Glans, Eds. (2011). Beyond the Consumption Bubble. New York, NY, Routledge.
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- Fuchs, D. A. and S. Lorek (2005). "Sustainable Consumption Governance: A History of Promises and Failures." *Journal of Consumer Policy* 28: 261-288.
- Godin, L. and M. Sahakian (2018) Cutting Through Conflicting Prescriptions: How Guidelines Inform "Healthy and Sustainable" Diets in Switzerland. *Appetite* 130: 123-133.
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- Hui, A., et al., Eds. (2017). Demanding energy: spaces, temporalities and change. Palgrave Macmillan.
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- Keller, M., et al., Eds. (2017). The Routledge Handbook on Consumption. Routledge international handbooks. Oxon, New York, Routledge (*Recommended reading*).
- Maniates, M. (2001). "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?" *Global Environmental Politics* 1(3): 31-52.
- Middlemiss, L. (2018). Sustainable consumption: key issues. London and New York, Routledge.**

Quist, J. and P. Vergragt (2006). "Past and future of backcasting: the shift to stakeholder participation and a proposal for a methodological framework." *Futures* 38(9): 1027-1045.

**Raworth, K. (2017). Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist Random House Business**

Røpke, I. (2009). "Theories of practice — New inspiration for ecological economic studies on consumption." *Ecological Economics* 68: 2490–2497.

Sahakian, M. and H. Wilhite (2014). "Making practice theory practicable: towards more sustainable forms of consumption." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 14(1): 25–44.

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