

**ASCEE team**

# Policy Instruments to Promote Sustainable Consumption

Minutes of the ASCEE Expert Workshop  
“Policy instruments to promote sustainable consumption”  
Brussels 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008

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## 1 Programme

ASCEE Expert Workshop “Policy instruments to promote sustainable consumption”

29<sup>th</sup> May 2008, Institute for European Studies (IES), Pleinlaan 15, B-1050 Brussels - Fifth floor

- 09:00 – 10.00 *Registration of participants*
- 10:00 – 10:30 **Introduction and welcome**  
**Welcome** – Sebastian Oberthür, Academic Director IES, Brussels  
**Welcome** – Nicole Dewandre, European Commission, Head of the Sustainable Development Unit, DG Research, Directorate Environment, Brussels  
**Introduction to the workshop** – Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg/D
- 10:30 – 11:00 **Session I – Setting the scene: European SCP policies**  
 Chaired by Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg  
**Ongoing and future work on SCP in the EEA** – Birgit Munck-Kampmann, EEA and ETC/RWM, Copenhagen
- 11:00 – 11:20 **Discussion**
- 11:20 – 11:35 *Coffee break*
- 11:35 – 12:45 **Session II – Selected results of the ASCEE project**  
 Chaired by Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg  
**General considerations on policies to promote sustainable consumption**  
 – Prof. Harri Kalimo, IES, Brussels  
**Some selected cases to promote sustainable consumption** – Eivind Stø, SIFO, Oslo  
**Empirical Insights** – Gerd Scholl, IÖW, Berlin  
**Policy recommendations** – Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg
- 12:45 – 13:45 *Invitation to lunch and poster exhibition*
- 13:45 – 15:00 **Session III – Views of external commentators and open discussion**  
 Chaired by Eivind Stø, SIFO, Oslo  
**Comments from a policy maker perspective** – Christian Löwe, German Federal Environmental Agency (UBA), Dessau/DE,  
**Comments from a researcher perspective** – Dr. Eva Heiskanen, National Consumer Research Centre, Helsinki  
**Discussion**
- 15:00 – 15:15 *Coffee break*
- 15:15 – 16:20 **Session IV – Views of external commentators and open discussion**  
 Chaired by Harri Kalimo, IES, Brussels  
**Comments from a NGO perspective** – Melissa Shinn, Green Advocacy, Portugal  
**Comments from a retailer perspective** – Xavier Durieu, Secretary General Euro Commerce, Brussels  
**Discussion**
- 16:20 **Concluding considerations** – Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg
- 16:30 *Closure of the workshop*

## 2 Introduction and welcome

### 10.00- 10.30 Introduction and welcome

**Opening speaker**, Sebastian Oberthür, Academic Director IES, Brussels

Mr. Oberthür gave general information about the IES and ongoing projects.

**Welcome**, Nicole Dewandre, EC, Head of the Sustainable Development Unit, DG Research, Directorate Environment, Brussels

Ms. Dewandre gave general information on SCP and its place within the EC. As she stated, SCP policy is on the agenda, and the EC is progressing. SCP is recognised as a key challenge, along with the key challenges of energy and climate change.

Ms. Dewandre spoke of the difficulty of this particular policy area, and the problem of the deeply rooted “non” sustainable consumption focus in political systems. She explained that there is knowledge on how to tackle the production side of SCP, but that less is understood regarding the consumption area for policy making.

Ms. Dewandre went further on to talk about the importance of research, to find ways to deal with, as she called it, a schizophrenic situation. The expectation of consumption research includes monitoring of behaviour, assessment, understanding consumption patterns, finding ways for leapfrogging and setting a vision. Every one of these aspects should be looked at in a combined way.

Finally, Ms. Dewandre mentioned the opportunities for research funding from the FP7, in particular brokerage and hybrid process, with the aim of bringing research closer to the policy process. Additionally, she mentioned a conference to be held in May 2009 on greening European research.

**Introduction to the workshop**, Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg

Mr. Rubik gave an introduction to the ASCEE project and on the structure of the workshop. Furthermore, he showed an overview of the objectives, research phases and the framework of the ASCEE project. The approach of the study included overviews and thereafter in-depth analysis by case studies with the focus on “greening of markets”, “raising awareness” and “making sustainable consumption easy”.

## 3 Setting the scene

### 10.30- 11.00 Session I – Setting the scene: SCP activities of EEA and ETC/RWM

Chair: Frieder Rubik

**Ongoing and future work on SCP in the EEA**, Birgit Munck-Kampmann, EEA and ETC/RWM, Copenhagen

Ms. Munck-Kampmann gave a general overview of the role and activities of the European Environment Agency. She started by describing the development of the EEA, becoming independent from the EC in 1990, and starting as a traditional reporting agency. EEA has since then moved into providing trends and outlook, and more recently conducting policy analysis. In its forthcoming strategy, EEA aims to support the policy process and the policy effectiveness.

Ms. Munck-Kampmann described the five European topic centres which work as in-house consultant groups as the Agency decides the work of the topic centres. There are two types of experts (engineers and economists) who work on topics as policy effectiveness assessments and environmental impacts of waste and resource use, etc.

The next multi annual strategy will cover the period of 2009-2013. Resource and Waste Management is Munck-Kampmann's topic centre, where they are conducting several projects such as a study on waste and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

There are not many SCP projects and they developed from the focus on waste.

Previous projects include

- sustainable use and management of natural resources 09/2005,
- Assessment – Europe's environment (4<sup>th</sup> assessment).

Currently, the EEA is doing a project on developing an indicator framework for SCP, and developing a format for fact sheets on SCP and on waste. Future projects include a literature study on drivers for private consumption, identifying indicators for demography with aim of finding the drivers, and GPP study. Finally, it was stressed that the EEA provides various type of support to its Member States.

## Discussion

There were several questions regarding the indicator framework: what would be the use of these indicators; which types of support for Member States exist; the weight or value of GPP (in programmes); how to set targets and limits (goals of the level of reduction), and whether SCP plans would include social aspects of sustainability.

## 4 Selected results of the ASCEE project

### 11.30-12.45 Session II – Selected results of the ASCEE project

Chair: Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW

**General considerations on policies to promote sustainable consumption**, Prof. Harri Kalimo, IES, Brussels

Mr. Kalimo spoke about consumer behaviour and the potentials for change of the habits of the consumer. He stressed the fact that there is a changing role of public authorities and that a new system of multilevel governance is emerging. With the new modes of governance, assessment becomes a vital part of the policy process. To demonstrate the assessment tool of the ASCEE project, Mr. Kalimo pointed out its objectives and criteria. The last part of his presentation was about institutionalising policy and the three dimensions of policy interventions on consumer behaviour, namely "greening of markets", "raising awareness" and "making sustainable consumption easy".

## Discussion

Questions mainly related to the assessment tool developed by ASCEE, and conversation over other similar tools, for example one that looks at the sectoral level, assessing actions that have an impact on a whole sector.

Mr. Kalimo explained that the side effects which are part of the ASCEE assessment tool do in a way look at broader effects of the tool.

**Some selected cases to promote sustainable consumption**, Eivind Stø, SIFO, Oslo

Mr. Stø started his presentation with the three dimensions of policy induced behavioural change (increasing user awareness, creating green markets, making sustainable consumption easy). In each dimension the ASCEE-team selected one example of European policies:

- (1) "One tonne less", a Danish increasing user awareness campaign,
- (2) "Green Funds Scheme", a Dutch greening the market initiative,

(3) “The Red/Green Calculator”, UK: making sustainable consumption easy.

One tonne less was launched by Danish Ministry of Environment in 2007 with the objective to decrease household emissions by one tonne per year. Mr. Stø gave an overview of the tools used to achieve the objective (advices to change consumer behaviour). Finally he analysed the achievements and the limits of the programme.

The Dutch Green Funds Scheme (GFS) is a tax incentive instrument that has been used to encourage environmentally friendly projects, e.g. in renewable energy, organic farming, or sustainable housing. The assessment of the GFS showed that it scored fairly well on the three dimensions effectiveness, social and economic impact (with the highest score for effectiveness). However, the success of the GFS depends on conditions on the governmental side (willingness to give tax advantages), the bank sector (availability of money) and the need for cheap loans from a sufficient amount of green projects.

The Red/Green Calculator (R/G Calculator) is a voluntary policy tool that provides retailers with an easy-to-use tool (database), which enables them to assess their own performance with regard to the sustainability of their product portfolio and consequently encourages them to change their offer. The publication is planned for early 2008. Mr. Stø saw many advantages of such an innovative scheme but also pointed out the limitations of a transfer to other countries.

### Discussion

There was interest in the R/G calculator, and questions regarding the difference between this instrument and energy labelling of white goods, which the ASCEE team explained. Additionally the risk of credibility and the reliability of data were questioned. This was somewhat clarified.

A participant explained a similar initiative in Belgium, providing LCA information.

### Empirical Insights, Gerd Scholl, IÖW, Berlin

Mr. Scholl presented empirical insights on four topics:

- (1) From production- to consumption-policies. He showed the “touchpoints” of policy instruments along the life-cycle of products, the shortcomings of current policies and the possibilities for a more consumer-related policy.
- (2) Between Government and Governance, where he stressed the advantages of public authorities to be more than a mere regulator. He concluded that policy makers cannot “outsource politics”.
- (3) The role of stakeholders, which play a vital role to achieve the success of SC policy. All strategic stakeholders (especially the retail sector) have to participate in the policy process.
- (4) New elements in instrumental design. There, Mr. Scholl demonstrated that there are plenty of “second-order innovations” (“old” instrument in new contexts) but also novel elements in design of policy instruments as collective action, adaptability and extended evidence-based elements from social sciences. Yet, he regretted the often still missing social dimension in many existing SC policies.

### Discussion

The first remark raised the question how to judge the validity of data, e.g. of chemical substances as this is also a question of law making. Voluntary information works, but must be based on reliable data.

A next comment stressed the fact that hard infrastructure (streets for example) and “soft” infrastructure (taxes, monetary policy) are needed together.

### **Policy recommendations, Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg**

Mr. Rubik gave structural recommendations for the policy process:

- Take multiple roles when designing and implementing a policy to promote SC.
- Design and support a SC policy that activates relevant stakeholders in business and civil society.
- Find appropriate forms of institutionalisation for the SC policy.
- Try to exploit the full potential of more SC patterns.
- Develop, support and use instruments with high built-in adaptability in areas of rapid technological progress.
- Seek an instrumental design that provides a sense of community, social feedback and practical solutions.
- Create a sound evidence-base for policy design connecting life cycle and market data with socio-economic data on consumer behaviour.
- Monitor and assess policy impacts as part of a continuous improvement process.

### **Discussion**

There was again a discussion on the assessment tool, how it was used, and the intention for its further use. Mr. Rubik explained that the time to assess by using the tool is time consuming, and therefore, within the ASCEE project, only nine instruments were assessed. He also added that such a tool could provide a basis for supporting policy decision making, but a new project would be required to carry out a complete assessment of all innovative policy tools.

## **5 Views of external commentators**

The ASCEE team invited commentators to view and discuss critically the presented results of the ASCEE project. To support them, five questions were raised:

- 1) What do you think about the recommendations formulated by the ASCEE team? Are they complete? Are they relevant? What is most, what is less important?
- 2) What is new to policies that promote more sustainable consumption patterns? What do you regard as an innovative approach?
- 3) How can modern SC policies best be implemented? What are practical steps to get policy approaches working?
- 4) How important is the retail sector for the implementation of SC policies? How can public authorities support the retail business to take a more active role?
- 5) What benefit does the monitoring of SC policies offer? How could it be established? What role might assessment tools, such as the ASCEE assessment tool, take in monitoring procedures?

### **13.45-15.00 Session III – Views of external commentators and open discussion**

Chair: Eivind Stø

**Comments from a policy maker perspective, Christian Löwe, German Federal Environment Agency (UBA), Dessau/DE**

Mr. Löwe firstly indicated the tasks of the UBA and the self-understanding of his semi-political perspective. The following part of his presentation dealt with five comments on the approach of SC policies.

- He pointed out the changing realities in the design of SCP policy framework and the challenges of SC policy implementation. According to Mr. Löwe, there is an over-complexity

of social reality and an under-complexity of understandings/solutions as general problem of the SCP discourse, this refers according to him more concrete to:

- shortcomings of instrumentalism and partial rationalities
- sustainable consumption as social phenomenon on different levels
- dynamics of societal modernization affects conditions of implementation
- SC policies are changing (social) realities not only on the consumer's side, but for all societal institutions.

He thought that SC policies are primary transformational and less interventional (e.g. low carbon economy, moralization of markets, circle economy). But also conditions change which influence SC policies, namely

- climate change and resource efficiency need further integrative strategies
  - increased interconnectedness of streams of goods, information and capital around the globe, structural changes in industry
  - the increase of the global consumer class and the knowledge society
  - innovation, product and technology cycles are getting shorter continuously in some sectors
  - there is a move from government to governance
  - the national level is losing importance for regulation, EU level important and international regimes
  - pluralisation of society, increased sensitivity for questions of social and ecological justice, new poverty, but also new political consumerism
- The next section concentrated on the questions what is new to policies on SC and what is innovative of the instrument. He observed that SC policy is multi-dimensional, and therefore a plurality of instruments is strongly needed to increase opportunities for environmental and social improvement and to increase capacity building and general grade of involvement. He hinted to institutional arrangements for instruments which support and promote innovation and social transformation towards more sustainability.
  - In the third comment, Mr. Löwe discussed the implementability of SCP policies which as a strategic approach should be based on knowledge transfer for sustainable lifestyles, activating civil society and institutionalization of a general culture of sustainability. He concluded that “old” instruments must be modernised and combined with new generation of instruments and complementary measurements to better increase social dynamics towards SC and sustainable lifestyles.
  - His fourth comment, Mr. Löwe highlighted the participation of stakeholders. He thought that strategic alliances are crucial (especially: identify where are the “architectures” of sustainability); institutionalization of cooperation by governmental bodies on different levels is important (moderated process) for the development of joint strategic framework.
  - Finally, he pointed out the importance of monitoring and impact assessment, explicitly naming the necessary conditions for a successful operation.

**Comments from a researcher perspective, Dr. Eva Heiskanen, National Consumer Research Centre, Helsinki**

Ms. Heiskanen started her presentation with the new and innovative aspects of SC policies, stressing the new modes of governance as well as the various roles of the consumer as purchaser, user, owner, employee, citizen, friend, family member, member of various groups.

She spoke about the relevance of ASCEE's recommendations. She regarded the multiple roles of stakeholders as important; government could not do this alone. Also adaptability which could be linked to supporting more radical and disruptive innovations than has been the case today is important for Ms. Heiskanen. The exploitation of the full potential of instruments has to be pursued which could also be linked to what other solutions are needed to use the full potential. Community, feedback & practical solutions are needed, this is relevant also for evidence-base and monitoring.

Ms. Heiskanen highlighted some practical steps to foster sustainable consumption, namely

- working together with all the forces in society that are trying to promote sustainable consumption or other related goals;
- carefully reviewing ongoing work and identifying gaps or ways to multiply the effects of existing policies;
- stimulating supply and demand side of markets through direct involvement, e.g. finance for energy and resource efficient investments;
- reviewing existing and planned 'other' policies to identify environmental effects (e.g., cultural policy – public libraries; health policy – school lunches); and
- integration of social aspects which is very important because "ordinary" people (including politicians) do not compartmentalise environment separately.

In her next part, the role of the retail sector was analysed, emphasizing the different aspects of retailers and their growing interest in sustainable consumption. Her last part concentrated on the proper conducted assessment and she ended her speech with the remark that SC policies will very soon be very important to mitigate severe social effects.

## Discussion

The first question was about what authorities could do and if it is possible to prescribe certain targets for, e.g., public procurement on European level. The answer was that targets are important but not set up yet. There would be a dominance of information orientation; therefore, capacity building (a better institutionalisation of SC policies) would be needed.

Mrs. Heiskanen mentioned that strategic impact assessment is obligatory for any new piece of legislation in Finland but that it would be of hardly any value as regards, e.g., the environmental impacts. An instrument such as the ASCEE assessment tool might add benefit to such assessments.

Mr. Löwe explained that in Germany, legislation has to be 'cost neutral' and that social costs are not included there, which would be a shortcoming.

Another participant added to this information that all pillars of sustainability need to be included, especially the social dimension, and that one must not forget that sustainable consumption is a global issue. Mr. Rubik answered to this remark that the social of sustainable development is essential, but that the task remains how to get it into the research. The whole range of possibly relevant departments could not be considered in the ASCEE expert interviews. Focus was on environment administration.

A comment was made that neither the consumer nor the group of retailers are homogenous groups. Any retailer would hope to gain competitive advantage, in particular in times where margins are low and market shares decreasing. Hence, a common approach for all retailers in the context of sustainable consumption policies would not be interesting at all.

Mr. Stø underlined that the consumer is more than purchaser, i.e., use and after-use is important as well. But this view must not lead to an underestimation of the buying phase that remains important.

Another question dealt with the topic whether the ASCEE recommendations are solely based on new/innovative approaches or if traditional policies have been regarded as well.

Mr. Rubik answered that green public procurement (GPP) might be old in one country and new to another. ASCEE could not cover all kinds of different policy instruments. Moreover, due to ASCEE methodology, namely expert interviews, a comprehensive coverage of all new approaches could not be ensured.

Mr. Kalimo pointed out that the recommendations are mainly based on the innovative policy tools analysed by the ASCEE team but that the ASCEE findings are not limited to innovative instruments alone. In principle, the recommendations would hold for any kind of policy to promote SC.

Mr. Löwe ended the discussion with the questions how to best communicate the ASCEE results to the Commission and how to move from second generation instruments to third generation instruments (e.g. health policies etc.)?

**15.15-16.20 Session IV – Views of external commentators and open discussion**

Chair: Harri Kalimo

**Comments from a NGO perspective, Melissa Shinn, Green Advocacy, Portugal**

Ms. Shinn considered the recommendations as good and revealing, especially the third recommendation, setting a legal institutional framework, was most important in her eyes.

To the question of the importance of innovative policies, she answered that there are very few policies except some tax and waste policies – so its all new according to her view. Political will to implement instruments is needed; this is crucial and that she noticed a lack of concentration on hard tools on sustainable consumption. Ms. Shinn missed in the ASCEE project the focus on existing waste policy tools, e.g. packaging directive.

In the next part, she spoke about the best implementation of modern SC policies and practical steps. A legal framework is needed which links policy tools with environmental objectives. She also challenged the perception that you do not mandate consumption patterns – according to her opinion, this is not true: there is a choice editing, e.g. through standards or retail product selection consumers do not have a choice.

A practical advice to support the retail business to take a more active role was in her opinion to create an information obligation law to force the suppliers of the retailers to inform about the sustainability of manufacture.

Finally she stressed the importance of the assessment of policies.

**Comments from a retailer perspective, Xavier Durieu, Secretary General Euro Commerce, Brussels**

Mr. Durieu started by presenting EuroCommerce, an organisation that represents national retail federations in 30 European countries, as well as representing some 30 companies in the retail sector directly. He emphasised that commerce has the closest link to the consumer, so that retail has an important role, even if its environmental impact is rather limited. As one of the most important tasks of the sector, he highlighted its ability to translate consumers' concerns upwards in the supply chain. EuroCommerce is not very enthusiastic about labelling. They welcome a future, smart, interplay between improved consumer education and an increased sustainability focus among retailers, using a wider range of information tools. Mr. Durieu was critical of political regulation of the field, stating that the sector did a better sustainability job when left alone.

**Discussion**

Ms. Shinn stressed the fact that the first recommendation is not based upon the research, more on personal opinion. Her organisation would not care if the instruments are innovative; she is missing the hard tools.

Mr. Durieu repeated the already mentioned argument that the retailers are unique and cannot be treated as a homogenous group. A participant remarked that one could not wait for legislations and that the responsibility must not be put on the retailers alone. Small improvements in many products would work better than radical changes. Consumers would need access to information.

Another participant pointed at the responsibility of the retailers which have to commit themselves to a sustainable development, it was posed the question whether retailers should not brand themselves as green as she sees great profit potentials there. Mr. Durieu accentuated that the market and the consumer decide. The GMO example would show that USA and Europe have different product lines because of consumers: competition is the driver. A comment was made that consumers would not buy products from sustainable forests more frequently because of the price.

Ms. Shinn complained about not-addressing advertising in the ASCEE-report as green-washing in advertising has to be stopped because it would create additional demand. A contrary opinion pointed at positive examples of products that have been actively promoted through green marketing, e.g. light

bulbs and gardening products. Small improvements on many products seem better than big steps on few ones. Someone mentioned that Max Havelaar products usually have limited spaces in the shops. The example of Austria was brought up that laws could be helpful, also for retailers; one should have the right to be informed. A last comment was made that consumers could do something, and that would be the case for all stakeholders as well, also for businesses. The advice was given for businesses to push their sustainable limits.

A last question was posed about what green products are and who has the legitimacy to decide that.

## **6 Concluding Considerations**

### **16:20 Concluding Considerations, Dr. Frieder Rubik, IÖW, Heidelberg**

At the end of the workshop, Mr. Rubik thanked all commentators and participants for their joining of the workshop and active involvement. He also expressed his thank you to IES-staff who took care for all the technical and catering issues.