

ASCEE team

Policy Instruments to Promote Sustainable Consumption

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1 Executive Summary

The ASCEE project deals with *innovative* instruments to strengthen sustainable consumption. Its empirical basis consists of about 80 interviews and nine case studies of which the core features of four (Green Funds Scheme, Red/Green Calculator, “We’re in this together” and “One Tonne Less”) are presented in the report.

The report begins with general considerations on policy making to promote sustainable consumption (SC). We refer to windows of opportunity for consumers, which can be created by market actors and by political authorities. With respect to the role of public authorities in SC policy, we observe that elements of traditional government actions are linked with governance, but that the new policy design is not linear. It changes mode and design during the policy process. The policy process generates different types of interventions and instrumental measures. To illuminate their impact, a new perspective was taken dividing policies in terms of their contribution to changing consumer behavior and grouping them along three dimensions; namely raising awareness, making sustainable consumption easy, and greening of markets.

Policy instruments on sustainable consumption should be assessed *ex ante* (i.e. prior) to provide preliminary insights into potential impacts. Due to a lack of ready-made assessment tools, the ASCEE project developed an own assessment tool and applied it to various cases.

These general considerations and our empirical work delivered interesting insights: Current priorities of governmental intervention address the supply side. Few measures put the consumers in the spotlight, and they are often confined to the provision of information, such as with eco-labels and consumer awareness-campaigns. We argue for a stronger sustainable consumption-related policy field. Its policy design has to be based on a crystal clear understanding of the state as institution arranging the framework. Framework setting is a core task of policy and the clear and committed involvement of public authorities to arrange a policy framework is necessary. Policy cannot be outsourced.

The success of SC policies is, to a large degree, dependent on the involvement of all strategic stakeholder groups. This does not imply, however, that action of as many stakeholders as possible should be encouraged. Rather, the challenge is to integrate the right stakeholders at the right point of policy formulation and implementation.

Though ‘real’ innovation can rarely be found in policy designs, the ASCEE project identified four *novel elements* with respect to modern SC policies:

Collective action is a key. To overcome motivational barriers, collective action should be organised within which people can share experiences with changes in everyday life.

Adaptability is crucial. The need to adapt policy instruments to altered market circumstances will be a continuing challenge, assuming that product innovation remains a major force in saturated consumer goods markets.

A solid evidence base is essential. Public policies should pay more attention to the generation and exchange of socio-economic consumer-related data.

The social dimension is another new element which needs to be taken into account more than is the case nowadays.

We close the report with eight *core recommendations*:

- Take multiple roles designing and implementing a policy to promote SC.
- Design and support an SC policy that activates relevant stakeholders.
- Find appropriate forms of institutionalisation for the SC policy.
- Try to exploit the full potential of more sustainable consumption patterns.
- Develop, support and use instruments with high built-in adaptability
- Seek an instrumental design that provides collectivity, feedback and 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 (CIP)

2 Introduction

The objectives and structure of this ASCEE Report

The aim of this paper is to present and initiate discussion on the preliminary outcomes of “Project ASCEE”. Project ASCEE considers the latest trends and best practices in sustainable consumption (SC) policies, and proposes key elements for strengthening this area of policy-making. The final results of the ASCEE Project will take the initiated discussion – in particular that to take place in Brussels on May 29 2008 – into account.

The structure of this paper is the following one: chapter 3 “*General Considerations on Policies*

to Promote Sustainable Consumption” presents conceptual considerations on policy for sustainability and sustainable consumption. Chapter 4 “*Some Selected Cases*” reports on four selected case-study analyses we carried out. Our central insights are presented in chapter 5 “*Empirical Insights*” which highlights our findings and key messages. Chapter 6 “*Policy Recommendations*” introduces our key recommendations addressed to policy-makers, public authorities and stakeholders.

The target group of this draft paper are the people involved in Sustainable Consumption policies, be they public authorities or private stakeholders. The ASCEE team looks forward to any feedback it may receive on the paper.

What is sustainable consumption?

The Oslo symposium in 1994 proposed a working definition of sustainable consumption as: “(...) *the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations*” (Symposium: Sustainable Consumption. Oslo, Norway; 19-20 January 1994).

This is an updating and specification of the Brundtland commission headlines in “Our Common Future”. Sustainable consumption focuses on the demand side of the economy, looking at how the goods and services required to meet basic needs and improve quality of life can be delivered in ways that reduce the environmental impact of consumption.

However, the environmental impact is just one dimension of the concept of sustainability. Two other frequently mentioned dimensions are the social and economic aspects of sustainable development. Economic growth and equitable social development belong to the concept. We have also seen that some commentators include democracy and political aspects as a fourth dimension (Cohen 2006). Our feeling is that even though these dimensions are treated equally, the environmental dimension is “more equal than the others”.

Why do we need a policy to deal with sustainable consumption?

Environmental policies have had some success in reducing environmental burdens since their introduction in the 1960s. The early production oriented policies aimed at improving the state of environmental media. These have later been supplemented by policies under the headline of Integrated Product Policy (IPP) which intended to green products and services. Different approaches and programmes have been formulated and – partly – implemented. A set of instruments has been applied, and interesting overviews are presented e.g. by OECD (2008) or European Commission (2004). But their outcomes seem not to have changed the environmental trends. The European Environmental Agency (2005: 14) concludes that “(...) the general trend is an increase of environmental pressures because consumption growth is outweighing gains made through improvements in technology. The reasons seem not to be a lack of activity, but a lack of integration and cohesion within public policy and also a focus on the supply side of markets in the programmes”.

Consumption-related issues and nowadays sustainable consumption is still a kind of a undersized spot of environmental policy despite the fact that consumption contributes considerably to environmental pressures as the following data document:

- Households consumed about 26% of final energy use in the EU in 2001 (EEA 2005: 33), their share of total CO₂ emissions was estimated by EEA (2005: 8) to be about 10% (excluding personal travel and mobility) in the EU 15 in 2002.
- About 2/3 of municipal waste derives from households (EEA 2005: 33).
- The main areas contributing to about 70-80% of these pressures are food/drink, housing and private transport (see Tukker et al. 2006; also EEA 2005: 14).

The linkage between sustainability and consumption – sustainable consumption – has to be on the policy agenda.

What has happened so far?

Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) has been on the international agenda since the early 1990s. It gained momentum, in particular with respect to implementation, at the World Summit of Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002. All participating countries committed themselves to promoting SCP; with developed countries taking the lead. More specifically, they made a commitment to promote the elaboration of a 10-year framework of programs on SCP, in support of national and regional initiatives (UNEP 2002). International activities began in 2003 at a First International Expert Meeting held in Marrakech. The intention of the so-called “Marrakech process” was to jointly develop the framework of SCP programmes¹.

European activities in SCP began some years ago on the basis of the experiences in e.g. Integrated Product Policy (see Szlezak 2007). A background document specifying the key challenges on SCP (and also Sustainable Industrial Policy) (European Commission, 2007) was prepared and reviewed by a stakeholder consultation process carried out in 2007. According to this document the challenges are leveraging innovation, better products, leaner and cleaner production, smarter consumption, and global markets. It have been announced that the European Commission is going to publish an Action Plan on SCP in Spring 2008.

At the national level², several Member States (e.g. Czech Republic, Finland and the United Kingdom) have drafted documents that outline their *conceptual based* approaches on SCP. However, concrete policy programmes explicitly tackling the challenge of sustainable consumption are very few in number³. Some Member States have integrated SCP into their sustainability strategies (e.g. Austria, France, Norway) without additional stand-alone SCP policy paper. Other Member States pursue approaches that focus more on the *instruments*, i.e. they implant and/or adopt instruments, tools etc. to strengthen SCP (e.g. Denmark, Germany) without a policy framework document.

Against this background: What is the scope and the aim of ASCEE?

The scope of the ASCEE project (see Box 1) is to consider the latest trends in policies supporting sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and to indicate key elements of how policies should be designed to strengthen especially sustainable consumption. Our main research emphasis deals with *innovative* instruments, approaches and best practices to strengthen and support sustainable consumption. The aim of ASCEE is to contribute to the policy development and

- to indicate promising innovative approaches and tools to foster sustainable consumption and
- to present some strategic recommendations on how to progress in this arena.

¹ See the webpage <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/marrakech/index.htm> for more information.

² See also OECD (2008), Szlezak (2007), UNEP (2002).

³ Sweden could have been an exception: the Swedish Consumer Agency prepared an action plan for sustainable household consumption (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs 2006) which has not been approved due to a change in the Swedish government in autumn 2006.

Our focus towards innovative tools and approaches is a structural one. We do not consider specific consumption areas like food, housing or mobility. We are looking for experiences and practises dealing with these innovative approaches. Due to the character of innovation, the level of implementation is modest; the often described implementation deficit is a general challenge for a sustainable consumption policy.

ASCEE in a nutshell

This paper is an outcome of the project “Assessing the potential of various instruments for sustainable consumption practices and greening of the market” (ASCEE). ASCEE is a research specific support action for policy in the programme “Scientific Support to Policies” of the European Union’s 6th Framework Research Programme. It began in February 2007 and will be finalised by Summer 2008. The project team consists of three institutes:

- *Institute for Ecological Economy Research [IÖW], Berlin & Heidelberg/Germany (www.ioew.de) [coordination]*
- *Institute for European Studies – Free University of Brussels [IES-VUB], Brussels/Belgium (www.ies.be)*
- *National Institute for Consumer Research [SIFO], Oslo/Norway (www.sifo.no).*

The ASCEE’s research team first identified policy instruments that promote sustainable consumption practices and a greening of the market in Europe. The focus was on innovative policies and instruments where the governments at the European Union, national or regional levels were actively involved. The actions and measures were partly already implemented, partly still at the stage of policy proposals. Our broad approach to policy instruments covered regulatory approaches such as product bans or minimum standards, economic instruments such as green taxes or subsidies, voluntary or mandatory information tools such as eco labels or energy labelling, other voluntary instruments such as voluntary agreements, information campaigns or green awards and co-operative approaches such as product panels. In 2007, almost 80 semi-structured (mostly telephone) interviews were conducted all over Europe. The interviewees were, for the most part, from public administrations, but also from non governmental organisations, academia and business.

Based on our overview of the policy instruments, we distinguished three themes to deal with the topic of SCP, namely greening the market, making sustainable consumption easy and increasing user awareness. Within each of these three themes, we analysed three exemplary cases which were based on secondary data (literature review, internet inquiries) and primary data (interviews with stakeholders): Product panels, technology procurement and the Dutch Green Funds Scheme were examples for the theme greening of the market, TopTen, the UK campaign “We’re in this together” and the UK Red/Green Calculator illustrate the theme of making sustainable consumption easy, and with regard to increasing user awareness the Danish campaign “One tonne less”, a new generation of eco teams and organic labels were dealt with.

Final results of all ASCEE projects will be published end of 2008.

3 General Considerations on Policies to Promote Sustainable Consumption

This chapter reports our main general considerations on policies promoting sustainable consumption. Consumption is up to consumers, their choices, habits and attitudes; consumers have different roles and it is important to look for “windows of opportunities”. These topics are reflected in section 3.1. Policy, and also consumer policy, is embedded in the discussion about new forms of policy – between government and governance. This is dealt with in section 3.2. Policy initiatives need some orientation, assessment tools; assessment should be an integral part of making sustainable consumption policy. The AS-CEE team developed their own approach which is shortly presented in section 3.3 and more exhaustively in Annex I. Section 3.4 is dedicated to the challenge of institutionalisation. The final section, 3.5 highlights three different ways pursued by us to influence consumer behaviour by sustainable policies.

3.1 Consumer Behaviour and Potentials for Change

From a policy maker’s point of view, the various instruments and the theoretical contexts surrounding them present an interesting challenge. For many of the instruments highlighted here, consumer behaviour plays a crucial part. It is difficult, however, for a macro manager to promote change if they do not understand some of the underlying dimensions of consumer behaviour in general. We will consider three important theoretical, empirical and political discussions that policy will have to come to terms with:

- the tensions between *rational consumer choice* and acts more guided by *habit or tradition*,
- the relationship between individuals in their roles of *citizens* and/or *consumers*, and
- the relationship between *needs* and *wants*.

Psychologists, as well as other social scientists, have engaged in the study of consumer behaviour in relation to sustainability. While the social psychologists emphasise the role of information in changing individual attitudes and consequently behaviour, the focus within environmental sociology has been on both individualistic and more structural theoretical models.

From a *rational choice* perspective, a starting point to a debate over individual choice/action, attitudes and behaviour is the *Theory of Planned Behaviour* (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). According to this, behaviour should be predicted from actors’ attitudes and intentions. Behavioural intention is supposed to be predicted from attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

The critique against Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) is usually developed along two dimensions. First, it is argued that individual consumers do not behave as rationally as the model presupposes. Secondly, the *context of social behaviour* is missing in the model. Consumers, however, are not only individuals. They belong to households or communities with values and norms, and they act within a political and economic context created by businesses and political authorities

Formally, logically and normatively the attitude-behaviour model is strong. It is its empirical or practical shortcomings that bring theoretical and meta-theoretical debates into politics. The idea is that we gain knowledge and insight by taking into account that consumers are not atomistic actors in the market, and consider their values, culture and social capital. Miller (1998) argues that consumption is not primarily an individual activity, but framed by specific cultural and social contexts within and outside of the household. Within this perspective, social norms, *habits and routines* are decisive factors explaining consumption practices. Following the same lines, Gronow and Warde (2001) claim that, during the nineties, the focus of consumer research went from conspicuous to

ordinary consumption. Consumption – in their perspective – is mainly about the everyday life of ordinary consumers, and this should be better reflected in contemporary research. We should not forget that consumption in modern societies is, to a large degree, mass-consumption of ordinary products with few opportunities for excitement. This observation is obviously relevant for efficient policy making on matters of sustainable consumption.

Another interesting contribution to this discussion is the theory of *practice* (Warde 2005). One of the advantages of this theory is that it concentrates both on social structures and individual behavior, without being moralistic. Human beings, also in their roles as consumers, take part in a large number of activities, and their concrete practice is decisive for their choices in the market. The starting point for the modern theory of practice is Bourdieu (1977, 1990). The challenge in this part of the work by Bourdieu is to develop a theory that establishes a balance in individual behaviour between determination and freedom (Warde 2005). Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* may also contribute to develop this balance between the social and economic structure on the one hand and voluntary behaviour on the other (Bourdieu 1979). The construct of habitus creates a dialectic relationship between social and mental structures. Thus, the habitus both determines individual behaviour and is determined by individual and collective practises.

Individuals have both short term and more long term interests beyond the market place; they are not only consumers (Stø et al. 2005). The complicated relationship between our roles as *consumers* and as *citizens* has been actualised by the shift in political paradigm from government towards governance in late modernity (see section 3.2). One of these processes is political consumerism or *individual collective action* as Micheletti (2003) calls this phenomenon. Consumption turns into politics when consumers choose market arenas to influence decisions made by governments and business, and mobilise other consumers to take part in this activity. This concept is closely linked to ethical consumption, where consumers make some of the same decisions without involving other consumers (Terragni et al. 2006).

The third discussion concerns the almost forgotten relationship between *needs and wants*, reintroduced in the book *How much is enough?* (Durning 1992). This need-want relationship has more or less vanished from environmental debates because so much has shown that *need* is a very problematic theoretical and empirical concept, at least as far as consumption is concerned (Campbell 1998). Similar studies have also challenged the simple value-for-money model. Baudrillard emphasizes the symbolic values of consumption: "The fundamental conceptual hypothesis for a sociological analysis of consumption is not use value, the relation to needs, but symbolic exchange value..." (Baudrillard 1981: 30). This phenomenon was also recognised by Veblen (1899/1925), more than a hundred years ago, as well as in more recent works by Bourdieu (1992), and in the post-modern tradition (Featherstone 1991). Consumption is closely linked to the identity of modern individuals, far beyond needs and the use value of products (Douglas and Isherwood 1996).

Jackson has tried to revitalize this discussion. It is problematic completely to replace needs with wants and desires, because with these concepts it is not possible to answer the question of "how much is enough?" (Jackson et al. 2004; Jackson 2004). There seem to be no limits to personal wants. For sustainability, this is important because there are physical limits to human activity, recognised by the vast majority within the scientific community. This is the main argument behind the rethinking of basic human needs. This is also the point of departure in the Brundtland report on sustainable development, defined as a "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations 1987).

Furthermore, previous research experience has shown the importance of creating *windows of opportunities for consumers* (Svane 2002). The main idea behind this theory is that in everyday life it is difficult for consumers to change habits, even if they are well

informed and motivated. However, when people make certain fundamental changes in their life, they are susceptible to changes on other aspects as well. Potential situations of opportunities (or “windows” of opportunity) could be when persons change dwelling, change workplace or occupation, get married or divorced, have children etc.⁴ In a recent Norwegian study (Throne-Holst et al. 2007), individual situations of opportunity were more important for energy saving than attitudes among consumers.

However, windows of opportunity can also be created by other actors in the market, and by political authorities on local and national level. In the EU project ToolSust (Stø et al., 2004), special focus was placed on the framework created by businesses and local policy makers. This means that for the positive values, attitudes and knowledge that are developing among consumers to be transformed into sustainable behaviour, the windows of opportunity have to expand substantially. This calls for determined policy making on local, regional, national, European and perhaps even global levels.

3.2 Policy: between Government and Governance

Shift and illusions...

The deficiencies of traditional, top-down command-and-control policies have been a standard mantra in policy debate in the EU and beyond for well over a decade; common to most of the rethinking since the 1990s has been a shift from “government” towards “governance”⁵. There are some aspects in the governance discussion that deserve a particular mention here⁶.

First of all, there has been a *change in the role of public authorities*, a shift from central authorities towards more diffuse locations for policy-making, closer to the public, the citizen, and the ideals of deliberative decisions. This type of decentralization is usually accompanied by shifts from highly hierarchical structures towards more representative ones, and it tends to emphasize horizontal relationships. The trend has also blurred the distinctions between public authorities’ and private parties’ role in policy making. While the state still acts as the central regulator, other stakeholders have emerged as co-regulators, taking part in public discourses and decision-making. Moreover, governance has moved closer towards the marketplace. Considering that consumption is very much about the marketplace, the trend is very relevant. It is also a complicated one: as was noted earlier, the societal roles of a citizen and a consumer are largely overlapping, yet they witness quite diverging behaviour.⁷

The second trend to be reckoned with is that of *multilevel governance*. Today’s policy processes are often characterized by multiple and transnational levels of decision-making⁸. The EU is a prime example of multi-level governance where local, national, European and international levels of decision-making are closely linked. Policy has of course always been practiced at various levels, and the most effective level of making policy is a constant source of debate. In the EU context, the principle of subsidiarity aims at clarifying the most effective level of the political system for a particular issue⁹.

The characteristics of sustainable consumption render this field of policy susceptible to the new modes of governance. It is unstructured and technical in nature, and huge amounts of information are required to deal with it (Hey et al. 2007: 1863).

Linked to the changes in governance as a *process*, one may also observe changes in the *policy instruments*. Traditionally, government has been characterized by “bureauc-

4 Within the NOA models of Vlek, Jager and Steg (1997) they use the concept of abilities and opportunities to describe some of the same phenomena on the individual level.

5 See for example Blumenthal and Bröchler (2006), Héritier (2003), Knill and Lenschow (2004), Mayntz (2006), Treib et al. (2005).

6 See Jordan et al. (2007: 285).

7 Van den Burg (2008).

8 Hooghe and Marks (2003).

9 Indeed, Schout and Jordan (2005: 204) have condensed governance into “the administrative version of Subsidiarity”.

racy, legislation, financial control, regulation and force” (Richards and Smith 2002: 79). The shift has been to rely relatively speaking more on *non*-regulatory instruments. This has increased the actors’ room to manoeuvre to adopt policy objectives; concrete solutions are connected with objectives, strategies, capacities and capabilities of target groups. Jordan et al. (2007) have observed in empirical studies that “(...) new environmental policy instruments (i.e. governance) are certainly not replacing regulations (i.e. government), but instead appear to be supplementing them. New environmental policy instruments are more likely to be used to plug gaps in national protection systems or to respond to new and processing problems (...)” (Jordan et al. 2007: 296). That means, that the often claimed *complete* shift from government towards governance replacing top-down approaches by self regulation and bottom-up approaches has neither taking place nor is it expected: it “remains an illusion” (FFU and IÖW 2008: 8).

Iterative and circular governance

If a replacement is an illusion, the question is what’s going on? Various authors have described the last mentioned developments as “hybrid” governance (Jordan et al. 2007, Hey et al. 2007): the responsibilities of private actors and public authorities in policy formulation and implementation come together (cp. Hey et al. 2007: 1862). The classic Community method of harmonized laws or economic incentives is in other words *complemented* with means such as monitoring, peer pressure and mutual learning¹⁰. The idea is that the combination of hierarchical control and civic self-participation is more effective than either one of the pure forms alone¹¹. With regard to the instrumental setting, supplementation rather than substitution of new environmental policy instruments is taking place, i.e. another “layer” supplements existing instruments.

Networks have also been proposed as an explanatory model¹² and a normative objective. In a network governance model, there is no longer a single steering centre in the society. Interaction within the non-hierarchical networks produces innovations and facilitates consensus building. This may in turn reduce resistance regarding the formulation of policy as well as its effective implementation¹³. This kind of policy making may be particularly well adapted to complex and dynamic social environments, where central coordination is difficult if not outright impossible to begin with¹⁴. Sustainable consumption is clearly an area of that kind. Consequently, the state’s role may have changed from an omnipotent authority to that of an insightful “activator”¹⁵. The state has not necessarily lost control, but the control has changed in its form. The authorities can maintain special, privileged roles in the policy networks through their existing and new means of intervention¹⁶.

Altogether, there is what might be described as *granulated* policy making. Elements of traditional government actions are linked with governance, but the new granulated policy design is not linear, it is changing its mode and design during the policy process. We therefore call it *circular* governance.

To conclude, sustainable production and consumption appear to require these kinds of “circular” governance approaches. Consumers act individually on the basis of their attitudes and values, yet are at the same time guided by and constrained by social and situational influences. The societal roles of a citizen and a consumer are largely overlapping, yet witness quite diverging behaviour¹⁷. These facts have rendered consumption so versatile and heterogeneous an issue that governments have struggled to address it effectively. The Netherlands is a case in point.

10 Treib, Bähr and Falkner (2005).

11 Mayntz and Scharpf (1995).

12 Mayntz (2006: 19f.).

13 Mayntz (2006); Rhodes (1997).

14 Mayntz (2006).

15 Mayntz (2006: 21).

16 Mayntz (2006: 22).

17 Van den Burg (2008)

In a complicated system of consumption, non-hierarchical forms of decision-making can produce more effective solutions. More information may be made available, a wider range of values taken into account¹⁸. Consumers, retailers and producers are examples of the civil society stakeholders in the sustainable consumption discourse, whose views need to be carefully integrated into the policy in a deliberative process.

3.3 Assessing Policy Tools

Assessment – an integral part of making sustainable consumption policy

Policy instruments on sustainable consumption should be assessed across their entire policy life cycles. *Ex ante* (i.e. prior) assessments can provide preliminary insights on the potential direct and indirect impacts of an instrument. The intended policy targets and their interrelationships, the expected short term and long-term outcomes, as well as the possible side effects can form a part of the analysis. Considering the novelty of sustainable consumption as a policy field, as well as the innovative nature of many of the proposed policy instruments, *ex ante* analyses seem very important. A properly conducted analysis will also increase the legitimacy of the planned instruments.

Ex post assessments of policy instruments, on the other hand, focus on the actual, perceived outcomes and experiences on the instruments. The assessments serve to gather empirical information on the tools, which may in turn be used to inform the future decisions. The assessment should not only look at the performance of the tool in isolation, but aim to place the analysis in the appropriate societal framework.

The main challenge in both *ex ante* and *ex post* analyses of sustainable consumption is the very large number of criteria to be assessed. Consumption policies are broad, complicated, fragmented and cover widely different areas in terms of products and consumers. An assessment needs to be dynamic, flexible and tailor-made for each particular case. At the same time, one should have sufficiently common elements that lead to practically relevant findings so as to assist informed decision-making.

Considering these requirements, there appears to be a lack of assessment tools that are adopted for assessing instruments and measures in the area of sustainable consumption. In other words, the policy assessment tools that are outlined in academic literature¹⁹ and in the official documents of the European Commission²⁰, the OECD²¹ and other international institutions, do not appear to take the above listed specificities of sustainable consumption well into account.

ASCEE's assessment tool

The importance of properly assessing sustainable policy instruments, the challenges of actually conducting such analyses, as well as the lack of ready-made assessment tools lead the ASCEE project to develop an assessment tool of its own. There are four main novel characteristics to the ASCEE assessment tool.

First, the created tool is adaptable for particular, focused uses. In this case, the focus was obviously the assessment of the sustainable consumption instruments. In particular, the assessment criteria needed to take into consideration the key characteristics of AS-CEE's objectives, i.e. the innovative nature of the instruments as well as their transferability to other countries or areas of consumption.

Second, the measurement is dynamic in nature: the weighing of the assessment criteria may be altered to align with the function of the research objective. For the ASCEE in-

18 Rhodes (1997). See e.g. Smismans (2006).

19 See for example Hatch (2005), Harrington et al. (2004) and US Congress (1995).

20 See documents such as the Impact Assessment guidelines (European Commission 2005e), the White Paper on European Governance (European Commission 2001), the Commission Communication on Impact Assessment (European Commission 2002), the Joint Practical Guide on Drafting Legislation (European Commission 2003b), the Commission Communication on the Lisbon Strategy (European Commission 2005a) and the Commission Communication on Integrated Product Policy (European Commission 2003).

21 See for example the OECD (1997, 2004, 2006).

struments, a weighing of criteria was formulated jointly between the ASCEE partners. On a more general note, the weighing permits analysis in different socio-economic settings and circumstances. The analysis may as a consequence be shifted from a mechanical, or in any event value-neutral, application to a more value-bound exercise.

Third, for *ex ante* analyses in particular, it appears important to be able to combine preliminary quantitative information with explanatory commentary. The qualitative element is a rough rating of each of the criteria. The rating is then combined with an open-ended qualitative assessment of the criterion. The qualitative part is essential because in many cases the rating will not be unequivocal. It also aims at making the analysis more transparent and the results easier to understand and verify retroactively.

Fourth, in addition to leading to assessment data, the tool helps in initiating and structuring a process of brainstorming. In other words, the assessment process may—and in application to ASCEE *did*—provoke insightful discussion on aspects of consumption that might otherwise not have been thought of.

The ASCEE assessment tool is divided into three broad categories of criteria:

- The first category addresses the environmental and political effectiveness of the policy instrument. There are also supplementary criteria, which deal with the ASCEE-specific criteria: of innovativeness and transferability of the instrument to other countries or areas of consumption.
- The second category of criteria is dedicated to economic impacts. These criteria analyse the instrument's costs, administrative burden and impacts on competitiveness.
- The third category assesses the social impacts of the policy instrument.

The three categories are further split into *assessment criteria*, 24 in all. These 24 criteria are the core of the analysis²². The ASCEE assessment spreadsheet contains next to each criterion a column that provides a short explanation on what the criterion is set to assess. The selection of the three main categories, as well as the 24 criteria that form the categories, reflect on the one hand the priorities given to policy instruments and policy drafting by the European Commission and other international institutions. On the other hand, the selection of the categories and criteria is based on research of academic literature²³. The design of the tool depends on its usage. The tool can be used for assessing individual instruments – this was the case in ASCEE – or for comparing instruments that have the same policy objective.

A novel aspect of the tool is that it allows the analyzer to weigh the different categories in relation to each other. While an accurate weighting is usually not sought after, nor even possible, a

	Max	
EFFECTIVENESS	55%	2,75
Environmental effectiveness		
Certainty of achieving goal	20%	5
Side effects	5%	5
Time required	2%	5
Clarity	2%	5
Sensitivity	2%	5
Dynamic features	5%	5
Preventive quality	2%	5
Life cycle approach	2%	5
Other	0%	5
Political effectiveness		
Political feasibility	3%	5
Subsidiarity	2%	5
Compatibility with EU & international law	2%	5
Other	0%	5
ASCEE-specific		
Innovativeness	8%	5
Other	0%	5
ECONOMIC IMPACT	25%	1,25
Cost-efficiency		
Government costs	3%	5
Industry costs	3%	5
Consumer costs	3%	5
Other	0%	5
Administrative efficiency		
Govt administrative burden	3%	5
Industry admin. burden	3%	5
Other	0%	5
Competitiveness		
International competitiveness	3%	5
Level playing field	3%	5
Side effects	4%	5
Other	0%	5
SOCIAL IMPACT	20%	1
Fairness & ethics & gender	8%	5
Employment	3%	5
Stakeholder involvement	4%	5
Side effects	5%	5
Other	0%	5
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	100%	5

²² See Annex I for an exhaustive presentation of the assessment tool.

²³ See footnotes 19-21 above.

rough division of the categories may be helpful in various respects. First of all, the mere observation that one indeed should see these elements of instruments as not necessarily having the same weight may be valuable. Second, a weighing of the categories will make the tool better adapted to conducting analyses in different socio-economic settings and circumstances.

The analysis usually should take place, not just on an instrument, but against the *specified policy objective* of the instrument in question, or a combination of such objectives. The objectives may vary considerably as a function of, for example, the defined time horizon (immediate v. intermediate v. longer term objectives) or scope (small local concerns v. vast international threats). Such variance will obviously directly impact the analysis. The first part of the assessment tool therefore contains a slot for carefully defining the policy objective(s) of the instrument under analysis.

The ASCEE assessment tool was hence considered as a checklist of the most relevant criteria for making a policy tool successful, effective and efficient. In addition to such predominantly *ex ante* application (i.e. use prior to the implementation of an instrument), the tool may also be applied *ex post* (i.e. to assess the success of an instrument after its implementation).

3.4 Institutionalising Policy

The taking up of sustainable consumption as a policy issue and the initiation of political activities may need to be embedded into the structures and working procedures of public authorities, but also of society and business. The setting up of institutions could be understood as “(...) emergent configurations which structure the context of actions for all actors, reduce insecurities and transaction costs, clarify expectations of other actors and support or sanction specific activities, make some of them more probable than others“ (Göll and Thio 2008: 71). The process of institution-building – institutionalisation – is considered as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. Institutionalisation means the introduction of an innovation, from the early stage in which the new idea was generated to the late stage in which the new approach has become a routine and fully institutionalised²⁴.

SCP could be dealt with in national strategies for sustainable development. This has been done for example, by Belgium and France. Some countries (e.g. Czech Republic, Finland, UK) have prepared their own national SCP programmes.

Sustainable consumption and production policies (SCP) became an important topic on the agenda. But the question is how to institutionalise them? International activities within the Marrakech process and activities within several countries are demonstrating that SCP has gained attention and is recognised as a new and innovative aspect of environmental policy, although there might be more attention towards the production part. Expert circles have started workshops. Conferences have been taken place. As knowledge on SCP increases, some first problem-solving activities

have begun. This means according to institutionalisation theory that a certain degree of pre-institutionalisation has been reached.

The future process of institutionalisation of sustainable consumption and its increasing implementation should be based on the elaboration of SC programmes or strategies. As mentioned (see box), a series of countries have started SCP-activities and prepared their own conceptual approaches, integrated them into their national sustainability strategies or continued/begun instrumental, sectoral or thematic policies. According to the OECD (2008: 54), except for Sweden and the UK, none of the OECD countries have prepared

²⁴ Institutionalisation theories distinguish several phases of this process characterised by some key elements, the phases are a pre-institutionalisation, semi-institutionalisation and full-institutionalisation. See for institutionalisation theory Tolbert and Zucker (1996) and Beschorner et al. (2005).

their own sustainable consumption programmes. The OECD (2008: 54) has highlighted that the preparation of a sustainable consumption programme is an important element to “(...) promote coherence and realise synergies across a range of policies: consumer, education, economic, social, environmental etc. In the absence of an integrated strategy, disconnected initiatives not only lack cohesion but also the full force of support by a range of government ministries and their policy tools.”

National strategies for sustainable development have been prepared for most of the EU Member States and also for the EU itself. They include the setting of goals and indicators of goal-achievement, priorities, stakeholder involvement etc. (cp. OECD 2006). Sustainable consumption and SCP have been treated in some sustainable development strategies (see box). The general strategy of sustainable development should deal with sustainable consumption and clarify links, synergies and responsibilities. Such strategies are characterised of high-level political agreement and attention and describe the general framework of different policy fields contributing to a sustainable development. Embedding sustainable consumption could increase its acceptance as a policy topic.

Between 2003 and 2005, the Finnish government established a Committee on Sustainable Consumption and Production (KULTU) that produced a report containing 75 suggestions for strengthening sustainable consumption in Finland.

The German Federal Ministry for the Environment has begun a national process on sustainable consumption and production involving all relevant stakeholders (see www.dialogprozess-konsum.de). The process aims to achieve a broad understanding about objectives and innovative approaches through which potentials of business and civil society can be tapped.

Institutionalisation also means that new institutions, either as a new unit within existing organisations or as a new entity, will be formed to take care of sustainable consumption issues. This is connected with the allocation of responsibilities and the demarcation between the responsibilities of different institutions, for example different national ministries. In this way ownership and responsibility could be arranged (see box for an example). A clear allocation of responsibility must be assigned to specific organisations, either embedded in existing ones or newly formed and – as another element - an interministerial coordination and information exchange is needed to improve coherence of policy activities.

Based on a joint initiative by the National Consumer Council and Sustainable Development Commission and funded by Defra and DTI, the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable (SCR) was appointed; charged with building wide ownership of sustainable consumption, and producing practical advice to Government for actions and policies to create a shift to more sustainable lifestyles.

tion issues. This is connected with the allocation of responsibilities and the demarcation between the responsibilities of different institutions, for example different national ministries. In this way ownership and responsibility could be arranged (see box for an example). A clear allocation of responsibility must be assigned to specific organisations, either embedded in existing ones or newly formed and – as another element - an interministerial coordination and information exchange is needed to improve coherence of policy activities.

3.5 Types of Policy Interventions

The starting point for ASCEE research was the ‘classical’ distinction between types of policy instruments (see Oosterhuis et al. 1996, GTZ/CSCP/WI 2006, OECD 2008). According to their varying regulatory impact, one can distinguish regulatory and economic instruments, performance of governments and public institutions (public purchasing), compulsory and voluntary information instruments, other voluntary instruments and cooperative approaches. This distinction takes the policy-maker’s perspective. It does not, however, illuminate the impact of the policy intervention. Therefore, a new perspective was taken dividing policies in terms of their contribution to changing consumer behavior. Policy instruments were grouped along three dimensions (see Fig. 1):

- raising awareness,
- making sustainable consumption easy, and
- greening of markets.

The first dimension – raising awareness – is closely associated with the planning phase of the consumption process, while the “making sustainable consumption easy” and the “greening of markets” dimensions are more closely linked with the buying phase of consumption.

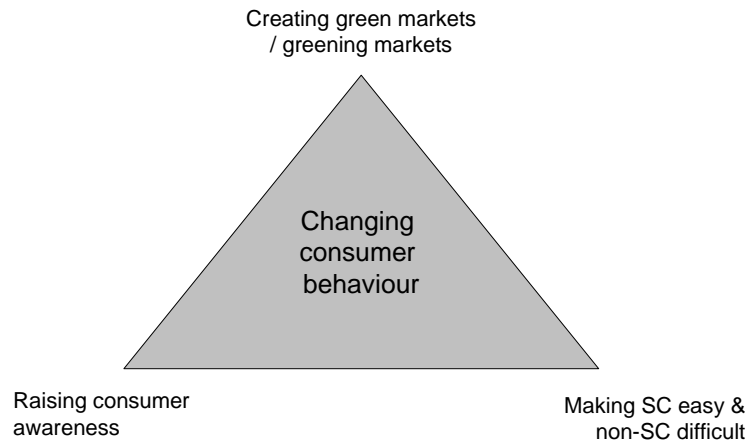


Fig. 1: Different ways to influence consumer behavior by sustainability policies

A substantial number of the instruments identified focus on *increasing consumer awareness*. These include mandatory or voluntary labeling schemes, information campaigns and information websites, eco-benchmarking tools²⁵, and consumer coaching measures, such as, e.g., “eco teams”²⁶. Evidently, raising consumer awareness is an important factor in changing behavior (see section 3.1). Awareness raising instruments are, however, limited as they depend on the consumer reacting voluntarily, sometimes without providing the necessary infrastructure or without helping the consumer to overcome barriers to changed behavior. The economic and political framework needs to be changed to assist the consumer to change behavior. Therefore, combination with other instruments that go beyond raising awareness is crucial.

The dimension of *making sustainable consumption easy* uses consumer behavior studies as a central point of departure. Instruments identified include various instruments that provide attractive offers to consumers and limit the range of non-sustainable products on the market. Examples are third-party investors for energy efficiency, point of sales guiding systems, bonus systems²⁷, retailer assessment instruments such as the Red/Green Calculator (see 4.3.1), green taxes or congestion charges.

25 Eco-Benchmark is a tool developed by the Finnish Environmental Ministry aimed at providing consumers key information on the environmental impacts of their consumption behaviour in an easily comprehensible, illustrative fashion. The main target group is currently key people involved in environmental education, but this is projected to expand to consumers more generally (see <http://www.environment.fi/default.asp?contentid=197441&lan=EN>).

26 The eco team is a top down method for having a small group of households change their behaviour in a more environmentally friendly direction. The eco team has originated in The Netherlands in the late 1980’s where small groups of six to eight households participating in a nine-month programme meeting once a month in order to discuss their consumption practices. The Eco Team method is developed by Global Action Plan International (GAP) and the “Eco Team” concept is a protected brand name.

27 Bonus systems are based on the same principles as loyalty cards in supermarkets. Consumers obtain credits for sustainable products that they purchase. The system could also be applied to the return of recyclable waste or other sustainable consumption behaviour patterns. The total amount of credits is translated into a tax credit at the end of the fiscal year.

It is acknowledged that consumers may be willing, but unable to act (see section 3.1). If the more sustainable products are not easily available, hard to know about or understand, or are prohibitively expensive, the greener purchasing decision may not occur regardless of the goodwill of the consumer. In fact, the mere perception that one is unable to adapt to certain behavior may be sufficient to prevent consumers from taking action. Therefore, the instruments in this category aim to take consumer behavior from the level of awareness to that of action, i.e. filling the “value action gap”. This may be achieved by creating an environment in which sustainable consumption is mainstreamed into consumers’ current lifestyles and by making the sustainable choice easy to implement, practical and financially attractive.

The *greening of existing markets* and/or the creation of markets for greener products is one central element of SCP policies. Several instruments can serve this purpose, for instance, public procurement strategies, market-oriented product panels, or innovative regulatory approaches such as the German Renewables Energy Act, mandatory standards such as minimum performance targets, and fiscal incentives such as the Dutch Green Funds System (see section 4.2.1). Against the two dimensions of “market penetration” and “environmental performance” a greening of markets can be achieved in different ways (see Fig. 2):

- by improving the environmental performance of products and/or by stimulating ‘greener’ product innovations,
- by phasing out or even prohibiting products with a bad environmental performance,
- by increasing the market share of environmentally benign products.

The strategies complement each other and environmental policy tools may address several of these at the same time. For instance, Green Public Procurement contributes to an acceleration of the diffusion of eco-efficient products and it may also, in particular as a technology procurement approach, create an incentive for more sustainable innovations.

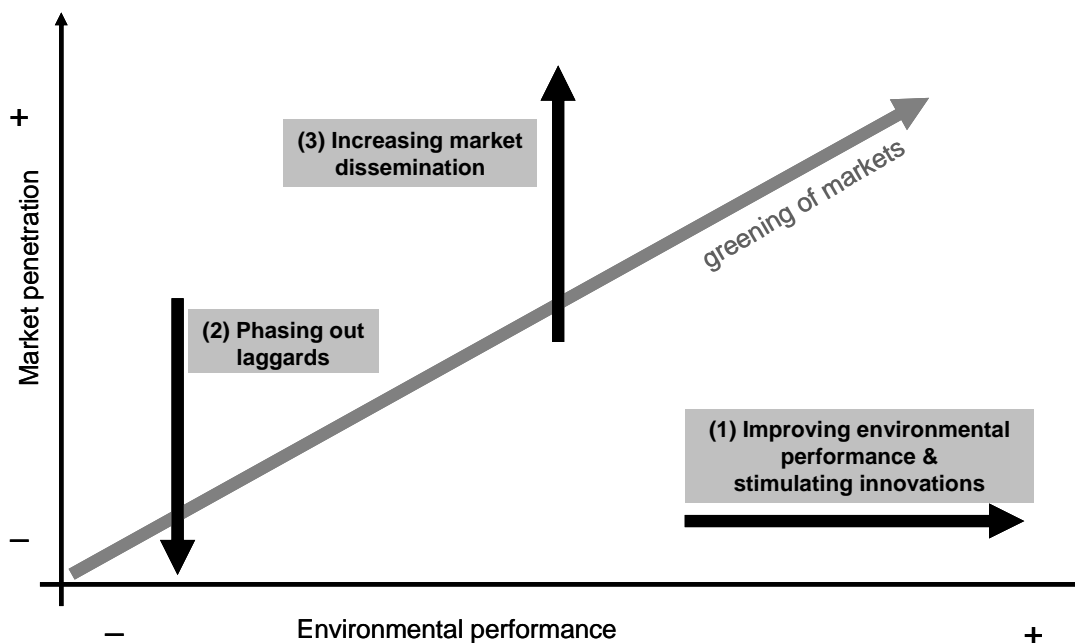


Fig. 2: Strategies of greening markets

Obviously, the three types of policy intervention – “raising awareness”, “making sustainable consumption easy”, and “greening of markets” – are not free from overlaps. Congestion charges may not only deter commuters from driving cars, but also positively influence the market for public transport services. And eco-labels do not only contribute

to raising consumer awareness, but they also spur greening of markets by increasing the visibility of greener products and by providing incentives for suppliers to make such offers available.

4 Some Selected Cases

This chapter presents some key information and results of some of our empirical basis. For each of the three themes we selected three cases. Due to limited space in this paper, we presented the four most interesting cases.

4.1 Raising Awareness

A substantial number of the instruments collected in the ASCEE project deals with increasing user awareness. Many of these tools are mandatory or voluntary labelling schemes. Others deal with guidelines for carbon neutrality, various top-down information campaigns, eco-benchmarking, innovative information web-sites and eco-teams. We have decided to consider the Danish information campaigns “One Tonne Less”, a new generation of Eco teams and organic labels.

4.1.1 The Danish “One Tonne Less” campaign

The Danish Ministry of Environment in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport and Energy launched the campaign “One Tonne Less” in March 2007. It is a one year campaign directed at Danish consumers in order to reduce the CO₂ emissions from the activity of modern households. The campaign is first of all directed towards the environmental dimensions of sustainability. It is within this dimension that there are formulated goals, and the campaign will be benchmarked according to the environmental attitudes and behaviour in December 2005.

A large number of businesses, NGOs and local political authorities are engaged in the campaign, and contribute substantially to the activity. However, the main target group is individuals and households. Consumers and households are divided into four different segments based upon a two dimensional table: knowledge about environmental problems (high vs. low), Environmental friendly behaviour (high vs. low)

In addition the One Tonne Less campaign has also selected two target groups for special attention. The first group is relatively “wealthy” green consumers; the other is children and young ones. The green consumers are informed of the environmental impact of their everyday life, and they have started their green practises. They need help and advice to develop their practices further. In particular, they need to distinguish between symbolic behaviour and changes that really matter. They are a target group because it could be possible to change their behaviour significantly during a one year campaign. In a way, they are the low hanging fruit of One Tonne Less. Studies show that young consumers are aware of the environmental problems, but they do not link these problems to their own consumption and everyday life. They are a target group because of significant potential, and because it is early in their consumption practices.

One Tonne Less has developed a large variety of activities to engage consumers in the campaign such as the CO₂ calculator, individual advice, competition and games, exhibitions and the involvement of celebrities and artists

A formal evaluation has so far not taken place because the campaign is still running. This means that it is difficult to make any scientific or political evaluation at this stage in the process. On the other hand, the campaign has itself formulated specific goals, and it should be relatively easy to make an evaluation when the campaign finishes.

It is very easy to be impressed by the way the One Tonne Less campaign has been planned, organised and carried out in Denmark. In many ways they seem to have done everything correctly. The campaign was thoroughly planned. The campaign showed political leadership. The message in the campaign was simple: to inform about simple ways to reduce the CO₂ emissions. The visions of the campaign were a fruitful combination of strategic and concrete measurable goals. The target groups were identified. The CO₂ calculator creates a virtual community. The material produced by the campaign, and the excellent homepage (<http://www.1tonmindre.dk/>) were designed for these target groups. One tonne less has also managed to build an impressive network of partners and stakeholders from businesses, public authorities and NGOs.

The campaign gives is impressive, and could be used by other countries as a guideline, when they want to design their own campaign

However, has it been a success? It is a traditional information and awareness raising campaign, where few new windows of opportunity are opened. This is the striking weakness of the One Tonne Less campaign. The framework created by businesses and political authorities is not at all changed. It has not been easier or cheaper to follow the environmental advice given in the campaign. The campaign is limited to inform individuals and households about the windows of opportunity for changes that already exist.

4.2 Greening Markets

The third theme “greening of markets” considered the Dutch Green Funds Scheme, technology procurement in Sweden and experiences with different types of product panels, especially in Denmark and Finland. As an example, we present the Green Funds Scheme. Other innovative examples are the German Renewables Energy Act, mandatory standards such as minimum performance targets or an economic instrument such as so called “white certificates” (also referred to as Energy Efficiency Titles).

4.2.1 *The Dutch “Green Funds Scheme”*

The Dutch Green Funds Scheme (GFS) is a tax incentive instrument that has been used by the Dutch government since 1995 to encourage environmentally friendly projects, e.g. in renewable energy, organic farming, or sustainable housing. Investing in the Green Funds means that individual investors – private consumers – lend their money to banks, at a lower interest rate, which is compensated by a tax incentive (environmental tax credit). The government provides the necessary legislation, supervises the banks issuing green funds or offering green savings and ensures that green projects are properly assessed against the ecological criteria set by itself. The green banks can then offer cheaper loans to environmental projects and thereby improve their financial condition.

The GFS contributes to the greening of markets in two ways: It supports the proliferation of, e.g., wind energy, energy efficient greenhouses, and organic farming methods, i.e. contributes to creating greener markets in energy production and in agriculture. And it creates a market for socially responsible investments that provides the opportunity for consumers to invest their money in an environmentally friendly way according to their green preferences. The Green Funds, as fiscally-facilitated investments, are unique in

Europe. No such scheme has been implemented in other European countries at the moment²⁸.

Judging the scheme, it “has had a catalysing effect on socially responsible saving and investment” (Scholtens 2005: 135), and therefore can be regarded as a successful policy instrument. The approach is convincing in that it provides a clear incentive to change to more sustainable (investment) behaviour and in that it reframes the symbolic meaning of the environmental dimension of sustainability – from environment as a threat to environment as an (economic) opportunity. By this intended side-effect, the system significantly contributes to raising awareness for ecological concerns, especially in the banking sector where sustainability has only gradually entered the agenda.

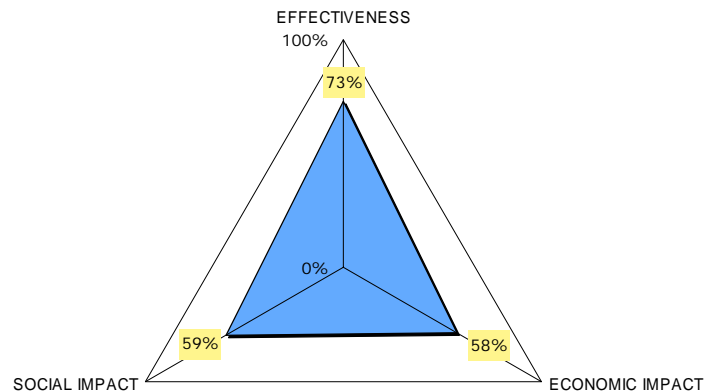


Fig. 3: Assessment of Green Funds Scheme

The GFS scores fairly well on all three dimensions of the assessment tool (see Fig. 3). Its social and economic impact is a bit smaller than its environmental effectiveness which is due to the fact that the GFS focuses on the ecological dimension of sustainability. The instrument is fairly cost-efficient, it achieves a reasonable stakeholder involvement and it may also contribute to job creation. A precondition for the success of the Green Funds Scheme is a triple-win-strategy: for consumers (tax deductions), for banks (reaching new target groups and satisfying social responsibility requirements) and for the funded projects (cheaper loans). It requires an appropriate fiscal regime and consumers as the investors/savers must be familiar with responsible investment.

Investors react very sensitively to any (planned) changes in fiscal policies. There were some political discussions on the scheme in The Netherlands which showed that the more discussions on the framework of the system, e.g. the amount of the environmental tax credit, the more difficult it is for the banks to assess the expected number and volumes of green project applications and of private investments respectively. Hence, such schemes will be more successful where the tax regime is fairly stable and trust between the government and the banking sector established.

The potential to transfer a fiscally facilitated green funds scheme to other countries depends upon the willingness of governments to give substantial tax advantages, the availability of money from individual investors and the need for cheap loans from a sufficient amount of green projects. The topic of green and/or social investments represents a rather progressive sustainability issue which is not yet widespread in Europe (Dawkins et al. 2006). Thus, it appears fairly unlikely that less developed European economies would start engaging strongly in this issue while other – possibly more pressing – sustainability concerns have not been tackled.

²⁸ Green Funds, however, are part of a more comprehensive discussion on (non-fiscally-facilitated) socially responsible investments (SRI). See e.g. Eurosif (2006).

4.3 Making Sustainable Consumption Easy

The instruments in this category aim at taking consumer behaviour from the level of awareness to that of action, i.e. filling the above explained “value action gap”. This may be achieved by creating an environment in which sustainable consumption is mainstreamed into consumers’ current lifestyles. The two examples chosen for further elaboration are “We’re in this together” and the Red/Green Calculator. Additional innovative instruments identified include voluntary product ranking systems, third party investors for energy efficiency, point of sales guiding systems, bonus systems, green taxes and congestion charges.

4.3.1 The UK “Red/Green Calculator”

The Red/Green Calculator (R/G Calculator) is a voluntary policy tool that strives to accelerate the shift towards more sustainable product offers on retailing shelves. It 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 R/G Calculator has not yet been presented to the public. It is currently in the final stage of development and publication is anticipated for early 2008.

The R/G Calculator aims to make it easy for retailers to comply with UK policy and targets to mitigate the environmental impact of products. At the moment, it covers the energy consumption in the use-phase of a number of different consumer electronic product categories.²⁹ The R/G Calculator translates performance data of these products into so-called ‘ecopoints’. Based on the ecopoint scores, the different products, but also the retailer as a whole, are classified ‘red’ or ‘green’. ‘Green’ stands for a ‘sustainable’ product offer and ‘red’ for not sufficiently sustainable products. The criteria for deciding whether a product is ‘green’ reflect not only the UK government’s (long-term) policy targets with regards to environmental goals such as energy efficiency and CO₂ emissions, but also the current product stock on the British market.³⁰

The R/G Calculator contains, on the one hand, product specifications for the current year and, on the other hand, projections for the government’s future targets for coming years until 2020. The increasingly more stringent indicative product specifications provide the retailer with a projection of which energy efficiency performance would be required to match government policy and targets in upcoming years. These future projections are valuable information for retailers’ business decisions and long-term planning.

It seems that there has not been a tool like the R/G Calculator before. In contrast to green labelling, the R/G Calculator does not use absolute criteria. It is based on relative specifications (average of stocks) and on dynamic requirements. This enables faster updating and much more flexibility. Another innovative aspect is the projection of future requirements. The R/G Calculator is unique to the UK. Some countries may have programmes similar to the UK Market Transformation Programme’s evidence base, but so far no other tool like the R/G Calculator is known to exist.

The retailing sector is in a key position. It is the link between production of goods and consumers. It has been claimed that “it informs the end-user about product features (...) [and] in its position as purchaser and customer it can dictate the conditions of supply. It works with suppliers to encourage product development and process optimisation” (Sarasin 2006: 5). The R/G Calculator enables retailers to source more efficient products and thereby to influence the manufacturing of products. And, on the other end of the supply chain, retailers influence consumer decisions by shifting towards a more sustainable product portfolio, which will make it easier for consumers to make sustainable choices

²⁹ Televisions, DVD players, video recorders, set-top boxes and external power supply units.

³⁰ The data underlying the R/G Calculator specifications are based on stock models drawn up within the UK Market Transformation Programme (MTP). MTP is a data-driven programme that “supports the development and implementation of UK government policy on sustainable products” (www.mtprog.com).

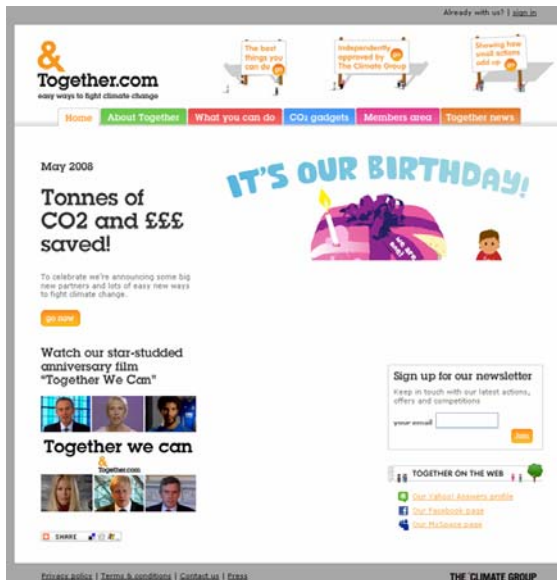
(NCC 2006: 1f.). Indeed, the tool will also make *unsustainable* consumption more *difficult*, because retailers are expected to remove the worst performing products from their selection to maintain their overall scores. It is therefore expected that the R/G Calculator could have a significant impact on sustainable consumption. Yet, the voluntary character of the tool could be a limitation to its success. This will be seen once the R/G Calculator has been in use for a sufficient period of time.

The R/G Calculator could be expanded to other product groups and beyond energy-in-use consumption. DEFRA is currently working on including water-using products. Yet, the crucial precondition for the inclusion of additional products and specifications is the availability of high quality data. For products such as food it might be difficult to design a R/G Calculator, as it is much more difficult to capture all the environmentally relevant aspects of this group of products.

The R/G Calculator could in principle be transferred to other countries. The crucial precondition is the availability of good and sufficient market data. We must also take into account the differences in cultures and in the levels of consumer awareness on environmental issues. In the UK, consumer awareness of environmental and climate change issues is high. Retailers see a benefit in providing sustainable products, because it will attract more clients. Also, public pressure can be generated to influence retailers. In a society with a low level of environmental awareness, the R/G Calculator would not be as well received by retailers.

4.3.2 The Campaign “We’re in this together”

We’re in this together (WITT) is a campaign, a cooperative approach instrument, that is based on the voluntary commitment of companies and the general public. The emphasis of WITT is to provide attractive, practical and environmentally sound offers to consumers. This way, sustainable consumption is made easy for the individuals, which may in turn induce a change in their behaviour.



Launched in April 2007, WITT may be seen as an instance of public-private collaboration. It was initiated and is supported by the UK government and run by the Climate Group.³¹ The campaign was launched as a 3-year programme and it is an offspring of several studies and strategic planning by and for the government. Support from the former Prime Minister Tony Blair was essential in attracting several companies to participate in WITT from early on. Membership to WITT is flexible. Currently, there are eleven corporate partners in this interest group.³² The initiative is defined broadly, which leaves room for a variety of companies to participate, as long

³¹ Members of the Climate Group: CORPORATE: ABN Amro, AIG, Alcan Inc, Allianz Group, Arup, Baker & McKenzie, Barclays PLC, Bloomberg, BP, BSKyB, BT, Catalyst, Cheyne Capital Management, Duke Energy, Google, HDR, HSBC Holdings, Interface, Johnson & Johnson, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Man Group, Marks & Spencer, Munich Re Group, MWH, News Corporation, Pratt Industries, Starbucks, Swire, Swiss Re, Tesco, Timberland, Virgin, MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT: Greater London Authority, New York City, REGIONAL GOVERNMENT: California, Connecticut, Maine, Manitoba, Massachusetts, New York State, Ontario, Quebec, South Australia, Victoria <http://www.theclimategroup.org/>.

³² B&Q, Barclaycard, British Gas, HSBC, More Than, National Express, O2, Sky, Tesco, The Mayor of London and M&S, all considered a major brand in the UK.

as the selection criteria are met.

WITT aims at decreasing the gap between consumers' sustainable intentions and actions in terms of carbon emission reduction by bringing together attractive offers. The website www.together.com provides a wide range of information and options on the corporate partners' offers, as well as general information on climate change. Within WITT, inbuilt indicators measure the success of parts of the campaign, and the development of the campaign may be followed on its website. The Climate group, along with the Energy Saving Trust, developed a model to calculate energy savings from most of the participating companies. WITT thus strives to provide basic practical knowledge, to have an impact on purchasing decisions through attractive offers, and to monitor its success.

Elements that contribute to the success of the campaign are considered to be extensive background research, government involvement and support, key stakeholder involvement, flexible structure with potential for transferability, a small-scale manageable project, with simple measures to reach the consumer, large influential corporate partners, credibility of the NGO managing the project, a broad and flexible scope, open to diverse participation, interactive, a well designed information website, the philosophy of collaboration, bringing together many small initiatives under one hat, creating a whole that is stronger than the sum of its parts, not demanding consumer sacrifice, providing practical solutions, providing corporate partners with guidance and assistance in developing solutions, and economic and institutional efficiency.

WITT's environmental effectiveness, compared to the intermediate goals and the scale of the project, appears to be relatively high. However, when looking at the overarching goal of dramatically reducing carbon emissions, it is unlikely that significant environmental changes will occur as a result of this instrument on its own. Some of the strengths and factors of success also make it vulnerable. Key barriers to the campaign include vagueness of criteria for participants (may lower environmental effectiveness), vulnerability as the initiative is dependent on the participants' dedication, management limitations, low brand recognition, other campaigns in the same field reducing the visibility of WITT, and a lack of secured ongoing funding. Moreover, the involvement and genuine commitment of participating companies are not guaranteed. The small scale of WITT requires relatively low level obligations from its corporate partners which may not bring about change in the short run.

The main innovative elements of WITT are the broad and versatile collaboration, as well as the approach to reach the consumer. By changing attitudes through behavioural changes, rather than the other way around, the tool makes it easy for consumers to make environmentally sound choices. It thereby has the potential to also reach environmentally less conscious consumers. This widens the scope for sustainable consumption policies.

The campaign is to be launched in the USA and Australia next year, with plans to spread WITT to India and China. No major barriers to transferring the campaign to other EU member states are foreseen, provided that political will, corporate structures, companies' interests to participate and understanding of the markets remain on a similar level.

5 Empirical Insights

This chapter reports on ASCEE team insights from empirical research carried out. Firstly, we refer to the challenge to connect production-related and consumption-related policy (see section 5.1). The following section 5.2 discusses a design of a sustainable consumption policy reflecting the government-governance debate of section 3.2. Linked to this, the role of stakeholders in a sustainable consumption policy will be stressed (section 5.3). During our empirical work, we discovered some new elements in the design of policy instruments. We report on them in section 5.4.

5.1 From Production-Related to Consumption-Related Policies

The focus of the ASCEE project is on public policies to promote more sustainable consumption patterns. In its instrumental overview, and also in the case studies, the project provides some evidence on the current priorities of government intervention. The majority of instruments address the supply side and only few measures are taken that put the consumers centre stage, i.e., product usage, lifestyles and consumption patterns (see Fig. 4). And the policy measures directly related to consumers are often confined to the provision of information, such as with eco-labels and consumer awareness-campaigns.

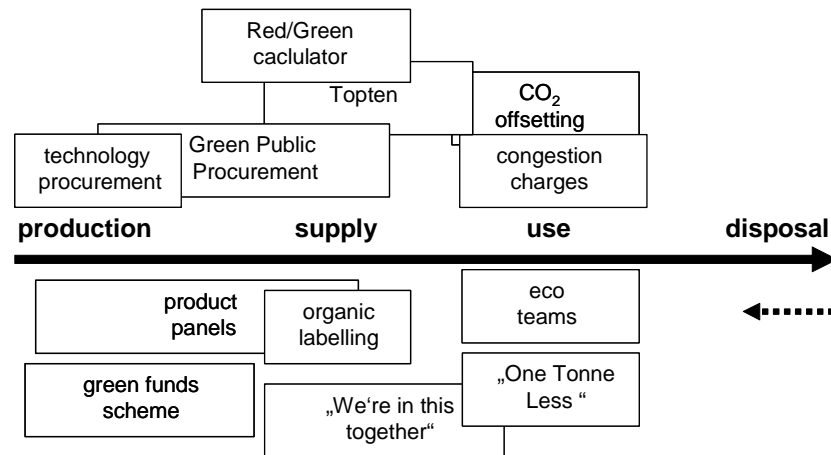


Fig. 4: 'Touchpoints' of policy instruments along the life-cycle of products

As we have argued in section 3.1, based on insights in e.g. behavioural sciences, information is not sufficient to change people's behavior. Everyday consumption practices are strongly driven by habit and context. Hence, in order to achieve substantial and durable alterations in consumer lifestyles, a more far reaching or different kind of intervention is needed, one that systematically develops an ability to consume in a more sustainable fashion as well as generating further opportunities for greener consumption. In this perspective, important approaches are creating an infrastructure that supports sustainable choices, e.g. by developing public transports services and by promoting spatial planning that leads to reduced mobility needs, and introducing motivational instruments that, for instance, give behavioral feedback and stimulate positive peer influences (Tukker et al. 2007).

As it appears from the ASCEE research current European policies to foster sustainable consumption in Europe have not yet sufficiently reflected this extended scope of policy intervention. One reason may be that consumption-oriented policies are often derived from cleaner production and integrated product policies that per definition focus on the production and supply side of the market and follow the *efficiency* paradigm and performance improvements. However, in order to exploit the full sustainability potential of public policies relating to consumption, a more explicit consideration of these aspects is required. In particular, taking into account the fact that efficiency gains are often offset by an increase of the absolute amount of consumption ("rebound effect", see Hertwich 2005) a re-consideration of the *sufficiency* paradigm might be required. That implies that policy-making does not restrict itself to improving the environmental performance of current product ranges but rather starts to reflect underlying needs and the complexities and dynamics of modern consumption patterns. As a consequence, knowledge on those factors that determine consumer behaviour becomes more important and a sound evidence-base crucial for successful policy making. This is also a shortcoming of current SC policies as

the ASCEE research clearly shows. While data on products and production processes becomes increasingly comprehensive and more easily available (see, for instance, the “European Reference Life Cycle Data System” [ELCD]) socio-economic data is still scarce and/or on a fairly aggregate level (see, e.g., the Eurobarometer Survey Series) and also rarely employed for policy formulation. The insights provided in the box below underline once again the need to create and more thoroughly consider empirical data on consumer attitudes and behaviour.

In its summary of research into consumer attitudes to sustainable consumption the UK National Consumer Council (NCC 2003) shows that

- *in order to engage consumers, the issues needs to be tangible and close to everyday life,*
- *consumers are unwilling to change their habits and, therefore, tend to overestimate the inconvenience of behaving in a more sustainable way,*
- *cost reservations often mask other barriers, such as inconvenience and lack of awareness, and greener products are often regarded as very expensive,*
- *consumers have low awareness of the impact their daily life has on the environment and of what sustainability improvements could be achieved by a change in behaviour,*
- *there is still a lack of access to facilities that enable more sustainable consumption patterns.*

5.2 In The Shadow of Hierarchy: Design of Sustainable Consumption Policy

Sustainable consumption policy is part of new governance approaches. As elaborated above, the shift from government towards governance does not happen in the often requested linear way.

The ASCEE project highlighted this aspect in the considered cases. Some examples:

- The Danish *product panels* were a cooperative and strategic approach and were embedded in the Danish strategy of a new triangle connecting market, policy and stakeholder perspective, i.e. to build bridges between the state and the market. Its cooperative approach did not mean a retirement of policy. Governmental authorities selected and nominated the chairs of each product panel, they funded operative work and projects agreed within the panel, and they participated at the panel meetings, at least as observers.
- The UK *Red/Green Calculator* is an outcome of the British Market Transformation Programme (MTP) which is run by the British environmental ministry, DEFRA. The conceptual development of this tool has been financed by the state. The empirical data needed to carry out calculations is provided by manufacturers and retailers. The calculator is a voluntary tool whose success largely depends on its usefulness to the retailers, manufacturers and potentially other interested parties making procurement decisions. The UK Government efforts will only be fruitful if the retailing sector is convinced of the benefits the calculator can bring and cooperates in the initiative.
- The aim of Swedish *technology procurement* activities is that public procurement takes market leadership by supporting the quicker market entrance of environmentally more benign products. By doing so their market dissemination is to accelerate. These activities demand a strong role of public authorities. They need to know technical and environmental characteristics of products of the same product group, must be in touch with the market actors and they must coordinate and aggregate public demand to come up with a critical mass of public demand.

These examples show that – within our empirical cases – the state is active and activating the market. A “shadow of hierarchy” (Scharpf 1993) is still visible: “The shadow of hierarchy can involve legislative threat or inducements” (Héritier and Lehmkuhl 2008: 2). The public authorities can take up distinctive roles at different levels of government, in different situations and at different moments in time. The example of the panels shows this clearly by encouraging the panel approach, by supporting its start, by observing its work, but finally by the willingness to act as regulator if panel activities fail. One should no longer limit the view on the government to a uni-dimensional, authoritative top-down role in the classic sense of the term. Rather, the government increasingly acts in various, changing facilitator roles in redirecting consumption. In a process that might be described as iterative or circular the responsibilities move in phases towards the government and away from the government towards governance agents.

What does this mean for the design of a sustainable consumption policy? What is the linkage between the different spheres, between the public authorities, consumers, business and stakeholders? Is self-responsibility of consumers and business a promising path?

Sustainable consumption is a complex subject for public regulation (see section 3.2). Deep green consumers are a part of the society, but they are still a minority. Green consumers often show an incoherent patchwork of different lifestyles, e.g. buying lots of organic food on the one hand and travelling by plane a lot on the other. Also, green consumption is not a static phenomenon. It may (offer potential for) change particularly during critical life events, such as change of dwelling, marriage, birth of children, health crises, etc. Hence, policy intervention may be especially fruitful when these “windows of opportunity” are open and it may be doomed to fail when the consumption context is fairly stable. As a consequence, it is not sufficient to inform consumers on the environmental features of products, on the use of products, or on their disposal. In order to exploit the full sustainability potential of private consumption policy needs to support the development of appropriate abilities of consumers and to promote the provision of additional opportunities to consume and behave in a more sustainable manner. A traditional top-down regulatory policy will be necessary, but not be sufficient to achieve this. Instead the government will need to be supplemented by more innovative modes of public-private governance.

Business is also not a mechanistic cost or profit optimiser which follows pure cost-benefit paths. Several strategic and operative factors influence business decision processes, such as long-term market strategies, e.g. defending or expanding market shares, networking and clustering of activities are some approaches. Therefore, it is also not sufficient to stimulate business by economic incentives or by consulting programmes that it does its bit. Also the belief in self-regulation and voluntary agreements has been disappointing in the past because the sanction potential of public authorities was not reliable enough.

The cooperation between public authorities and business, consumers and stakeholders has to be based on a crystal clear understanding of the state as an institution arranging the framework. Framework setting is a core task of policy and a clear and committed involvement of public authorities to arrange a policy framework. “Policy makers hence can't ‘outsource’ politics” (Barber et al. 2008: 13).

The traits of the examples presented above also leave their mark on the policy design of sustainable consumption. The role of public authorities is versatile and not static, they change their level of activities as situations require. Public authorities need to elaborate – in cooperation with business, consumers and stakeholders by exchanging opinions, insights and strategies – and to indicate targets; thereby acting from a strong position. Target setting serves as benchmark informing and instructing the public. The formulation of instruments and tools addressing the challenge of sustainable consumption must mobilise

the potential of civil society. Often an instrumental mix³³ is applied despite difficulties in categorising ensuing outcomes in a clear-cut, unambiguous manner. Overlaps are numerous, and usually intentional. Many policy tools need to be operated in parallel to reach the desired objectives effectively and efficiently. However, policy addressing the potentials of market participants must be aware that soft approaches, incentives, information, consulting or labelling, has some shortcomings. Market reactions and adoptions have to be monitored to recognise distance from targets. Here the role of policy is an observing one. But this is not sufficient. Policy should indicate sanctions if effectiveness of other approaches fail. The role changes now from observer to regulator.

Governance-oriented policy approaches might be more time-consuming than traditional regulatory top-down policies. Businesses and civil society organisations need to be taken on board and often compromises need to be found. Exchange of opinion, consensus-findings and also political decision-making needs time. Policy makers have to take this into account when formulating policies to promote sustainable consumption. All the more as this more long-term-oriented policy perspective might conflict with shorter policy cycles.

5.3 Role of Stakeholders

What is meant by the concept of stakeholders? The “classical” stakeholder concept was developed within the management theory dealing with the relationship between business firms and corporations on the one hand and their environment on the other. It was an expansion of the well-known shareholder concept. Accordingly, stakeholders can be defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (Freeman 1984). During the last twenty years this concept has been developed in various directions:

- First of all, we have seen the development towards a “Corporate Social Responsibility” (Carroll 1999; Windsor 2001). This concept calls businesses to take responsibility beyond their economic performance and consider other interest than their shareholders’.
- Secondly, the concept has been expanded from business management to society integrating the responsibilities of organisations, policy makers, science and consumers (Dentchev and Heene 2003).
- At last, we have witnessed a discussion on the categorisation of various groups of stakeholders. The most relevant distinction is between primary and secondary stakeholders: “A primary stakeholder group is one without whose continuing participation the corporation cannot survive. Secondary stakeholder groups are defined as those who influence or affect, or are affected by the corporation” (Clarkson 1995: 196f.).

With sustainable production and consumption a relatively large topic is addressed. It covers various economic and social activities, and the potential stakeholders are numerous. Furthermore, they vary substantially from one case to another. In most cases *primary stakeholders* are identified along the value chain and include producers, retailers and consumers. *Secondary stakeholders* comprise organisations or associations linked to the primary stakeholders, such as business associations and consumer/environmental NGOs. Within the category of “other stakeholders” the most significant groups are the scientific community and the media. This is illustrated, for example, by their participation in the global discourse on climate change.

In the following, the role of stakeholders as it has been recognised in the cases we presented above (see section 5.3) will be briefly discussed. Primary and secondary stakeholders will be identified, their role (mandatory or voluntary) and their kind of engage-

³³ See OECD (2007: 25-27).

ment (formal or informal) will be characterised. Finally, the way individuals are drawn into the case, as citizens or as consumers (see section 3.1), will be commented on.

- The *One Tonne Less* campaign is a traditional, top-down awareness raising information campaign, well inside the “government” paradigm. A lot of business partners have joined, but it is not obvious that these businesses are “stakeholders” in the campaign. They do not really seem to have a stake in the impacts of the campaign. Instead they seem to use it primarily for reputation purposes, in times where it is tempting to be affiliated with work against global warming. The way to associate individuals is innovative, since they commit themselves by signing up for specific measures. It is, however, hard to identify any stakeholder approach in One Tonne Less.
- The Dutch *Green Funds Scheme* (GFS) is set up by the government, with close cooperation between different departments (environment, finance, agriculture, transport). The primary stakeholders are the green banks and their customers and the green entrepreneurs seeking finance/cheap credit for their projects. Secondary stakeholders might be their local communities and perhaps some sub-contractors of the entrepreneurs. Consumers are recognised as secondary stakeholders indirectly through a Dutch association (social investment forum) providing advice for the responsible public authorities. Stakeholder involvement is voluntary, but formalised. If banks, for instance, wish to join the system, they have to meet the strict requirements of the ‘Green Institutions Scheme’.
- The UK *Red/Green Calculator* is a voluntary policy tool, developed by the United Kingdom Environment Department as a part of the UK Market Transformation Programme (MTP). The main stakeholders are major retailers, manufacturers and trade associations. The primary stakeholder is the retailer who uses the tool. He addresses the importers, the producers and the consumers as secondary stakeholders. Stakeholder involvement is voluntary, and mainly informal. Producers of products rated “Red” are stakeholders at the receiving end of market transformations. They will find it very hard to compete in a market for environmentally improved products. Individual benefit comes to the citizen/consumer if he or she – as a retail client – is concerned with the products’ environmental performance.
- In the campaign “*We’re in this together*” (WITT), participation is based on the voluntary commitment of companies and the general public. The main body of the WITT is the eleven participating companies. It might be fruitful to call these companies stakeholders, since they have a stake in some of the campaigns’ objectives, like when the UK retailer Tesco is setting a goal of selling ten million energy saving light bulbs in a specific year. In our perspective, the eleven corporate partners are the primary stakeholders in WITT. It is, however, not obvious that the “supporters” of the campaign should be defined as secondary stakeholders. Participation seems to be voluntary and largely informal, with companies offering more or less the same as they would have done anyway. Individuals benefit from the campaign as consumers to the extent that WITT succeeds in making sustainable consumption easier.

What do we learn from this brief overview?

Obviously, the success of SC policies is to a large degree dependent on the involvement of all strategic stakeholder groups. This does not imply, however, that one should encourage action by many stakeholders as possible. Rather the challenge is to integrate the right stakeholders at the right point of policy formulation and implementation. While public authorities per definition have a major role to play, alongside manufacturers and their associations and consumer and environmental NGOs, retailers seem to (re-)gain importance as gate-keepers to greener products (e.g., Ytterhus et al. 1999). The retailing sector is in a key position – “It informs the end-user about product features (...) [and] in its position as purchaser and customer it can dictate the conditions of supply” (Sarasin 2006: 5) – and, thus, should be paid special attention when it comes to the allocation of responsibilities among the value chain actors.

5.4 New Elements in the Design of Policy Instruments

The aim of the first empirical project stage in ASCEE, the basic instrumental overview, was to identify policy instruments promoting sustainable consumption practices and a greening of the market in Europe. The focus was on policies and top-down instrumental approaches, i.e. actions, measures and proposals where the European Union or a national or regional government is actively involved. Furthermore, the idea was to pay special attention to innovative approaches and instruments. In the absence of a general clear-cut definition of “innovative SC instruments” we arrived, in a pragmatic fashion and based on the interviewees viewpoints at a distinction between two forms of innovation:³⁴

- “First-order innovation”: One can speak of this kind of innovation when an instrument is completely new to SC policy. It represents any approach or tool that has not been applied in the context of sustainable consumption before.
- “Second-order innovation”: This kind of innovation occurs when a policy instrument is new to a specific application context. This can, for instance, be a country where the instrument has not been applied before (e.g. organic labelling in Romania) or a new environmental issue the tool has not addressed before (e.g. extension of the scope of the EU eco-design directive towards non energy-using products).

Not surprisingly, the first type of innovation was not found very often. In our sample of case studies the Red/Green Calculator, which provides retailers and manufacturers with a means of assessing, on a voluntary basis, the energy efficiency of consumer electronic products that they procure and sell, can be regarded as an example for this first-order innovation. It is an approach which has not yet been implemented elsewhere (see 4.3.1).

The second type of innovation, where an ‘old’ instrument is applied within a new context, for instance a new country, was encountered very often. Examples are the diffusion of the “TopTen” internet platform from Switzerland to other European countries or the uptake of Green Public Procurement (GPP) by Portugal where the purchasing potential of public administration had not been utilised extensively for sustainability purposes before the National Action Plan on GPP was implemented in 2007. Another example for this second-order innovation is the introduction of a congestion charge in the Swedish capital of Stockholm following the London pilot project.

Though ‘real’ innovation can rarely be found in policy designs, the ASCEE Project identified *novel elements* with respect to modern SC policies and the instruments applied therein:

Collective action is key.

Campaigns like “We’re in this Together” or “One Tonne Less”, and also the “Eco-Team” approach, which is a method for having a small group of households change their behaviour in a more environmentally friendly direction, place strong emphasis on community-building among stakeholders and particularly among consumers. By so doing, they follow the fundamental idea of “creating a supportive framework for collective progress, rather than exhorting individuals to go against the grain”, as it has been formulated in the UK “I will if you will” report (SDC and NCC 2006).

In section 3.1, we have discussed that consumers are strongly driven by habits and that convenience often takes precedence in pressured daily lives. Therefore, consumers tend to overestimate the costs of change. One may overcome this motivational barrier by organising real or virtual peer groups within which people can demonstrate that (little) change in everyday life is actually feasible and within which they are provided with opportunities to ‘lead’ by good example.

³⁴ It refers to the distinction made in innovation research between something ‘new-to-market’ as opposed to something ‘new-to-the-firm’ (e.g., Garcia and Calantone 2002).

While keeping in mind that the strength of this approach must not induce governments to place the responsibility for more sustainable lifestyles on consumers alone, it is clear that it offers new potential to tie SC policies more closely to social realities.

Adaptability is crucial.

Modern SC policy instruments have to cope with shorter innovation cycles and accelerated market pace. Consumption areas characterised by this phenomenon are, for instance, consumer electronics and information technology, passenger cars, and – probably to a smaller extent – household goods such as washing machines, dish washers or cold appliances. Obviously, in these areas an instrument such as ‘classical’ eco-labelling schemes is increasingly incapable of keeping up with rapidly progressing product developments. An instrument such as the “Topten” information platform is more flexible in this respect.

Topten is a consumer-oriented online search tool that displays and enables simple comparison of the most energy-efficient products that are available on a range of national markets (www.topten.info/). Product assessments take place on a 6-month basis. Twice a year, all product groups are re-assessed, which is usually translated into changes in the selection of the 10 best available products. Furthermore, new products can be added as soon as the necessary information is provided.

The need to adapt policy instruments to altered market circumstances will be a continuing challenge assuming that product innovation remains a major force in saturated consumer goods markets. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are a good example. As, for instance, a recently published German policy brief summarises the task is “to strengthen the synergies between regulatory design requirements, obligatory labelling and voluntary eco-labelling and to dovetail the dynamisation of these instruments” (BMU and UBA 2008: 12).

A solid evidence base is essential.

One important point of departure for the Danish One Tonne Less campaign has been a consumer survey from 2005. The results from this survey function as a benchmark for central indicators. One derived goal is, for instance, to increase consumer knowledge, i.e. the percentage of correct answers on climate change, from 58% in 2005 to 75%. In addition to these indicators, the selection of main target groups of the campaign – ‘wealthy’ green consumers on the one hand and children and young ones on the other – has also been informed by recent scientific evidence.

Scientific evidence has traditionally played a role in environmental policy formulation, for example, in clarifying the environmental performance of one-way versus returnable packaging. Also today a sound evidence base appears to be a major success factor for current SC policies. What has changed, however, is the thematic scope of the evidence required for proper policy design. In some of the approaches studied in the ASCEE project the information comprises not only technical and life cycle

assessment data, but also evidence from social sciences referring to issues such as consumer values and attitudes, heterogeneity of consumer groups, barriers for change in everyday life, etc. The Danish One Tonne Less campaign (see 4.1.1) is one example and also the “Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours” developed in the UK shows that effective policy design will benefit from a good evidence base.

In its 2008 report “A Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours” the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) sets out a framework for Defra’s work on pro-environmental behaviour. It pulls together evidence on public understanding, attitudes and behaviour. It identifies behaviour goals; and draws conclusions on the potential for change across a range of behaviour groups. It is designed to support policy development and implementation in Defra, in other UK Government Departments and externally. The report has been prepared by a new environmental behaviours unit



Hence, public policies to promote sustainable consumption should pay more attention to the generation and exchange of data that helps to come up with policy tools better fitting everyday lives of consumers.

The social dimension: another new element?

Apart from these three comparatively new features of at least some of the policy instruments one could envisage another new element in public policies to promote sustainable consumption, namely a more explicit consideration of the social dimension of sustainability. As far as the ASCEE overview reveals, however, this is not the case yet. Policies still mainly address the environmental problems of consumption while the social dimension of current consumption patterns, such as the working conditions in upstream stages of the product life cycle or the terms of international trade, have not yet been captured to the same extent (see also Szlezak 2007: 34).

Policy approaches integrating the environmental and social dimensions of sustainability are encountered, for instance, in labelling instruments (see box). In addition, the issue of ethical consumption and fair trade is sometimes a matter of public information and education campaigns. But until now a more binding consideration of social issues in policy design, e.g. in procurement guidelines³⁵ or taxation policies, is not established yet.

The Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) created a „Fairtrade“ label which primarily addresses the social dimension of sustainability. It ensures proper living and working conditions for those employed in agricultural production. Besides criteria such as paying a minimum price which is above world market level the label covers, however, certain ecological standards, e.g. with respect to the use of pesticides. For products from organic cultivation a premium is paid. In the meantime, fair-traded rice, wine and bananas which are sold in European markets are almost entirely grown organically. For chocolate this share is up to 50 percent, for coffee up to 60 percent, and tea and cacao up to 70 percent.

³⁵ One exception is the UK Government timber procurement policy introduced in 2000. It requires the government’s central departments to actively seek to purchase legal and sustainable timber and wood derived products. The central government departments report that certified products accounted for 75% of their expenditures spent on timber in 2003/2004 (<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/what/documents/timber-procurement.pdf>, accessed 13.05.2008).

6 Policy Recommendations

The analyses and insights presented above result in seven key recommendations dealing with the development of a sustainable consumption policy:

Take multiple roles when designing and implementing a policy to promote sustainable consumption.

Consumption is a complex issue and its greening cannot be a task of consumers alone. A sustainable consumption policy is needed. The traditional top-down regulatory policy is necessary to give a clear framework orientation. This should be with more innovative modes of public-private governance (e.g. by cooperation, by networking, by involvement of stakeholders) which supplement regulatory policy. Governments should be flexible and adjust their role to the different situation in an iterative process of policy formulation and implementation. They may be observers, activators, facilitators or regulators. These multiple roles are spread over at diverse levels of government and they differ according to situations, to the stage of development of the policy, to the success of policy implementation. Responsibilities of public authorities move in phases towards the government and away from the government towards governance agents. All in all, this renders policy-making and the creation of coherent strategies very challenging. One should somehow coordinate the process(es) without suffocating the innovative experimentation.

Design and support a sustainable consumption policy that activates relevant stakeholders in business and civil society.

The success of SC policies is to a large degree dependent on the involvement of all strategic stakeholder groups. Which stakeholders are indeed relevant depends on the objective and the context of the instrument(s) considered. Besides the manufacturers, it is the retailers as the gate keepers to greener products and the information providers to consumers who deserve more attention during policy formulation and implementation. For instance, public authorities should provide means to assist the retailing sector in greening its assortments. Other key groups such as architects, electricians or plumbers can play an important role in educating and influencing consumers. In addition, environmental and consumer NGOs have an important role to play in raising consumer awareness and providing independent advice on the numerous sustainability issues associated with consumption patterns.

Find appropriate forms of institutionalisation for the SC policy.

There are different elements to ‘give shape’ to a policy aiming to foster more sustainable consumption patterns. One may set up dedicated programmes containing policy objectives and policy instruments, one may impose an appropriate legal framework, and/or one may closely link sustainable consumption-oriented policies to the national strategy on sustainable development. Another option is the appropriate embedment of SC policy into a number of different policy fields (e.g. environmental, consumer affairs, industry, finance). Finding a responsible partner is another core element of institutionalisation. All options have their pros and cons. But without any of them, policy initiatives might suffer from a lack of visibility and fail to activate relevant stakeholders.

Try to exploit the full potential of more sustainable consumption patterns.

Improving the overall environmental performance of products and greening current consumer goods markets via strategies such as “choice editing” is an essential element of any policy to promote sustainable consumption. It may neglect, however, that efficiency gains can be offset by a growth in demand (“rebound effect”). And it may hide huge sustainability potential contained in the way products and services are used in everyday lives. For instance, achieving more sustainable washing practices is not only a matter of stimulating demand for more efficient washing machines and driers. It also requires advice on proper washing procedures (temperature, filling quantity, dosage of washing de-

tergent) and – last, but not least – a reflection of underlying social standards with respect to comfort, cleanliness, and convenience. The same need for a refreshed perspective may apply to the food sector where – on average – half of the emissions are connected with food storage and food processing and ‘only’ 45% with food production. Hence, effective SC policies will strongly benefit from addressing issues that are beyond the supply side and efficiency improvements and that more explicitly address use patterns and consumption levels.

Develop, support and use instruments with high built-in adaptability in areas of rapid technological progress

Rapid technological advance is a major feature of many consumer goods markets. This observation may apply not only to electrical and electronic goods, but also to non energy-using products such as cleaning products with fast changing formulations or clothing from varying fabrics. ‘Classical’ policy instruments, such as obligatory efficiency labelling or voluntary eco-labelling, are increasingly incapable of coping with the accelerated market dynamics. Hence, a dynamisation of requirements and a shortening of revision cycles becomes a crucial success factor for a policy that is to stimulate innovation and to help consumers make better choices. Public-private-partnerships to establish information platforms presenting the ‘best-in-class’ for different product groups may be an additional way to meet this challenge. It is important to provide incentives for manufacturers on the leading edge of technological innovation to continue their efforts and at the same time provide stringent requirements that catch laggards.

Seek an instrumental design that provides a sense of community, social feedback and practical solutions.

Consumers are strongly driven by habits, and convenience takes precedence in busy daily lives. As a consequence, consumers tend to overestimate the costs and effort of behaviour change and underestimate the positive impact of altered consumption patterns. Therefore, policy should create a framework which is supportive to collective progress and which contributes to mainstreaming sustainable consumption patterns. One way to achieve this is building (real or virtual) communities, e.g., around public information campaigns or eco-labelling schemes, within which people can learn and demonstrate that (little) change in everyday life is actually feasible and worthwhile and within which they can give and receive feedback to and from their ‘partners-in-crime’. SC policy could learn from marketing techniques by developing so-called ‘social marketing’ strategies.

Create a sound evidence-base for policy design connecting life cycle and market data with socio-economic data on consumer behaviour

Scientific evidence traditionally played a role in environmental policy formulation. This is the domain of e.g. LCA-studies; such tools are based on technical, “hard” data not considering the challenges of the consumption sphere (like different consumer segments, heterogeneous consumption patterns, potentials of “windows” of opportunities). Also today a sound evidence base is important, but the thematic scope of the evidence required for proper policy design has changed. Evidence from social sciences which refers to issues such as consumer values and attitudes, heterogeneity of consumer groups, barriers for change in everyday life, etc. is needed to be able to design effective sustainable consumption policy and its instruments and tools. For instance, the Danish One Tonne Less campaign and also the UK “Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours” show that effective policy design will benefit from a good evidence base.

Monitor and assess policy impacts as part of a continuous improvement process (CIP)

Public authorities should assess ex-ante sustainable consumption instruments; this could provide first and preliminary insights on the potential direct and indirect impacts of an instrument and contribute to better policy-making and increase the legitimacy of the planned instruments. To support this, the ASCEE project has prepared an assessment

tool. A periodical monitoring is necessary to judge the degree of goal achievement, and to correct mismatches of policy formulation and implementation. This monitoring could be embedded in the monitoring of sustainability policy in general, but with some clear consumption oriented indicators (e.g. household consumption of energy, of key materials). Monitoring and assessment should be linked to judge the state of strengthening sustainable consumption. A continuous improvement process (CIP) could be reported upon periodically, e.g. by four-year progress reports, connected with some measurable targets.

7 Literature

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8 Annex: ASCEE's assessment tool

Assessing institute & person					
Date of assessment					
TOOL DESCRIPTION					
Tool Name		The assessed tool could be one policy instrument or a particular mix of tools.			
Type		Which category does the tool belong to? [regulatory, economic, performance of governments and public administrations, compulsory information, voluntary information, other voluntary instruments or cooperative approaches]			
Definition of goal		What is/are the tool's specific goal(s)? This could entail short-term and a long-term goal(s). This assessment should be conducted with regards to this/these particular goal(s).			
EFFECTIVENESS					
	Weight (50% of total 100%)	Indicator	1 = great neg. influence 2 = neg. influence 3 = no pos. or neg. influence 4 = pos. influence 5 = great pos. influence X = tool absolutely	Justification / comments	
	55%	Max:	2,75	0	
Environmental effectiveness					
Certainty of achieving goal	20%	Is it likely that the declared goal will be met? Are there many uncertainty factors? [almost absolute certainty = 5 / great number of uncertainty factors = 1]	5	0	
Side effects	5%	Are there any foreseeable positive or negative environmental side effects (on other sectors, policies, consumers etc.) that should be taken into account? [many pos. effects = 5 / no side effects = 3 / many neg. effects = 1]	5	0	
Time required	2%	How fast will the declared aim be met? Are there many factors that slow it down? [almost immediate effect = 5 / very long = 1]	5	0	
Clarity	2%	Is the tool clear and understandable to the person or organisation of whom action or compliance is required? [very clear = 5 / not understandable for target group = 1]	5	0	
Sensitivity	2%	Would the tool work under different geographical and societal circumstances? [very high sensitivity = 5 / no sensitivity at all = 1]	5	0	

Political effectiveness					
Political feasibility	3%	Is the tool politically controversial? Are problems to be expected in its adoption? [not controversial at all = 5 / highly controversial = 1]	5	0	
Subsidiarity	2%	Is the instrument suitable for the proposed level of governance or would another level be more suitable? [proposed level is best suited = 5 / proposed level is absolutely not suited = 1]	5	0	
Compatibility with the EU & international law	2%	Does the tool take EU internal market and international agreements into account? [complies 100% with all existing agreements = 5 / major problems are to be expected = 1]	5	0	
Other	0%	Are there any other aspects in this category that would be of relevance to the tool?	5	0	
ASCEE-specific					
Innovativeness	8%	Is the tool innovative? Does it use a new approach to addressing the respective problem? [highly innovative = 5 / no new element whatsoever = 1]	5	0	
Other	0%	Are there any other aspects in this category that would be of relevance to the tool?	5	0	

ECONOMIC IMPACT					
	Weight (25% of total 100%)	Indicator	1 = great costs / burdens 2 = costs / burdens 3 = low costs / burdens 4 = no costs / burdens 5 = gains / reduction of burdens X = tool absolutely unfeasible		Justification / comments
	25%		Max:	1,25	0
Cost-efficiency					
Government costs	3%	Does the tool place a high financial burden on government to introduce, to enforce and to monitor the requirement? (The <i>administrative</i> burden is assessed separately below.) [reduction of burden = 5 / low burden = 3 / very high burden = 1] - shange of scale	5	0	
Industry costs	3%	Does the tool place a high financial burden on industry to comply with the requirements? (Note: the cost for the company to merely compensate for the environmental damage it causes (i.e. "internalisation of externalities") should <u>not</u> be taken into account as a burden) [reduction of burden = 5 / low burden = 3 / very high burden = 1]	5	0	
Consumer costs	3%	Does the requirement place a high financial burden on consumers? [reduction of burden = 5 / low burden = 3 / very high burden = 1]	5	0	
Other	0%	Are there any other aspects in this category that would be of relevance to the tool?	5	0	
Administrative efficiency					
Government administrative burden	3%	Does the tool place a high <i>administrative</i> burden on government to introduce and to enforce the requirement? [reduction of burden = 5 / low burden = 3 / very high burden = 1]	5	0	
Industry administrative burden	3%	burden on industry to adjust to and to comply with the requirement? [reduction of burden = 5 / low burden = 3 / very high burden = 1]	5	0	
Other	0%	Are there any other aspects in this category that would be of relevance to the tool?	5	0	
Competitiveness					
International competitiveness	3%	Does the tool influence the competitiveness of the industry targeted by the tool in one country with regards to international competition? [very pos. influence = 5 / no influence = 3 / very neg. influence = 1]	5	0	
Level playing field	3%	Does the tool create a horizontal level playing field within the sector targeted by the tool? (i.e. will some actors have to carry an unjustifiedly high burden)? [absolute level playing field = 5 / very high inequality of burdens = 1]	5	0	

SOCIAL IMPACT					
	Weight (25% of total 100%)	Indicator	1 = great neg. influence 2 = neg. influence 3 = status quo / no pos. or neg. influence 4 = pos. influence 5 = great pos influence X = tool absolutely unfeasible		Justification / comments
	20%		Max: 1	0	
Fairness & ethics & gender	8%	Are the intended burdens and benefits of the tool fairly divided <u>between the different societal groups</u> such as youth, elderly, women, men; industry, SMEs, consumers, public administration? Does the tool raise ethical issues? [high fairness = 5 / high unfairness = 1]	5	0	
Employment	3%	Does the tool lead to an overall net gain or loss in jobs (taking possible job losses in certain areas into account) [high overall level of job creation = 5 / neither gains nor losses of jobs = 3 / high overall losses of jobs = 1]	5	0	
Stakeholder involvement	4%	Does the tool involve all relevant stakeholders? [High involvement = 5 / no stakeholder involvement at all = 1]	5	0	
Side effects	5%	Are there any foreseeable positive or negative social side effects (on other sectors, policies, consumers etc.) that should be taken into account? [many pos. effects = 5 / no side effects = 3 / many neg. effects = 1]	5	0	
Other	0%	Are there any other aspects in this category that would be of relevance to the tool?	5	0	
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	100%		5,00	0,00	