



Creating a Sustainable Future



One of Europe's leading authorities on the subject of sustainable production and consumption, **Dr Gerd Scholl** talks to the EU Research about the CORPUS project, the issue of sustainable consumption and bridging the gap between policy and research

Sustainability is an issue that is becoming increasingly important as our natural resources become depleted. The rate at which we consume is increasing year on year and if we are to continue our current lifestyles, we need to seriously consider alternative methods of production and consumption.

Dr. Gerd Scholl of the Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW), Berlin, spoke to EU Research on the subject of sustainable consumption and the CORPUS project that he is currently a part of.

Graduating as an economist in 1993, Dr Scholl began working with the IÖW that same year. With a background in German national and EU wide projects that looked at product related environmental policies, he has also worked on eco labelling and life cycle assessment. From here, he has progressed to research into sustainable product service systems, such as sharing, renting, and leasing.

Dr Scholl's interest in sustainable consumption grew from a belief that sustainable development could not be achieved without altering consumer lifestyles, especially in more economically developed countries. "Efficiency gains at the product or service level are often offset by an increase in demand," Dr Scholl explains. "This clearly shows that technology cannot be the sole cure to consumption. We need a more accurate

picture of what we consume, and why, in order to successfully pave the way for a sustainable consumer culture. The idea is to create a culture in which we consume less natural resources and differently." In order to achieve this, Dr Scholl believes that there needs to be a broad societal transformation, addressing businesses, policy, and civil society alike. "It will require a wide range of disciplines and trans-disciplinary integration to come up with appropriate strategies. That's the great thing about research into sustainable consumption; it is informed by diverse scientific communities and often geared towards a practical solution." It is this philosophy that underpins the CORPUS project and makes it such an important tool in the area of sustainable consumption and development.

The CORPUS project is one that hopes to tackle the issue of consumption from the point of view of diverse scientific communities, and by connecting these communities to a wider audience. It aims to develop novel ways of brokering knowledge between policy-making and research. The CORPUS acronym stands for: Enhancing Connectivity Between Research and Policymaking in Sustainable Consumption. The idea is to utilise a number of methods in order to explore the issues of sustainability from both the side of researchers and from the side of policy-

makers. The project is made up of a consortium of 11 European organisations, all working together to establish a centralised hub of knowledge that will allow easier discourse on the subject of sustainable consumption.

"CORPUS was inspired by the need to improve the transfer of knowledge between research and policy with the aim to support evidence-based policy making for sustainable consumption," Dr Scholl told EU Research. "For more than two decades researchers from all over Europe, and of different disciplinary backgrounds, have analysed barriers to and drivers for more sustainable consumer behaviours. There is a huge body of evidence out there which is, however, under-utilised in policy-making for various reasons: different mind sets and professional cultures, diverging time lines, mismatch of agendas, and others too." This lack of connectivity between communities is all the more problematical as sustainable consumption has gradually climbed within political agendas.

According to Dr Scholl, the overriding objective of CORPUS is to experiment with and develop new integrative modalities of knowledge brokerage at the policy-science interface. He sets out three avenues that will ultimately lead toward this objective:

- Improving the understanding of the knowledge interface between research

and policy-making and developing appropriate and transferable methodologies and tools for knowledge brokerage in sustainable development

- Fostering evidence-based policy-making in sustainable consumption policies (on food, mobility, and housing) at European and national level and strengthening the policy-orientation of relevant research communities through the development and implementation of online and offline knowledge brokerage mechanisms
- Stimulating community building across the involved research and policy-making communities in order to trigger a self-sustaining process of effective knowledge management in sustainable consumption policies

Essentially, the CORPUS project hopes to bridge the gap between researchers and policy makers in an attempt to spread the knowledge of sustainable consumption to a much wider audience. "CORPUS primarily addresses researchers and policy-makers," Dr Scholl explains. "The general public might benefit indirectly from CORPUS in that policies that foster more environmentally and socially benign consumer behaviour are more effectively tailored to people's needs, opportunities, and abilities. By improving the science-policy-interface, research evidence will be better exploited and thus will have more of an impact."

There are two primary methods that CORPUS employs to bridge the gap between policy and research. The CORPUS web platform – the "Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Knowledge Hub" – allows access to a vast array of data that pre-exists and will become a focal point for the uploading of future articles and data. The CORPUS workshops provide researchers and policy makers with the opportunity to enter into personal dialogues and facilitate opportunities for networking. The web platform and workshops form knowledge networks and communities of practice, which will nurture the transfer of knowledge. "Knowledge exchange will come about naturally to the extent that researchers and policy makers personally

connect within and across their professional communities," Dr Scholl tells us.

What makes the CORPUS project unique is that, at present, it is the only knowledge repository in the area of sustainable consumption and production. It is also the only project which offers a diverse means to enhance connectivity between research and policy on sustainable consumption, particularly in the areas of food, mobility, and housing.

The results of the CORPUS project will be processed in a way that will potentially benefit an even wider audience. Dr Scholl explains: "A policy brief will summarise the main results of the research and provide recommendations on proper knowledge brokerage for sustainable development policies." While this brochure is primarily aimed at policy consultants and policy practitioners, it will also be available for, and useful to, scientists in applied research. "It will offer advice on how to communicate scientific evidence more effectively."

At the time of writing, the CORPUS project is reaching its halfway point. So far, more than 700 experts in the field of sustainable consumption have registered on the web platform and are benefiting from access to the wealth of data available online. The workshops have also attracted numerous professionals and are proving to be effective means of encouraging networking between disciplines. The full extent of the project's aims are by no means realised yet, and Dr Scholl is confident about CORPUS' goals. "Community building is a challenging task which takes time," he told us. "Inter-community collaboration can only be achieved when benefits are obvious for both sides and can easily be realised. Given this challenge the project's running time of three years can be regarded a rather short one." While the CORPUS project is only funded by FP7 for three years, it aims to continue its mission past this point. "We hope to continue maintaining the web platform after the project has ended," Dr Scholl says. The overall desire is for CORPUS to evolve into an established institution for knowledge brokerage on sustainable consumption and production.

At a glance

Full Project Title

CORPUS - Enhancing Connectivity Between Research and Policymaking in Sustainable Consumption

Project Objectives

The overriding objective of CORPUS is to experiment with and develop new integrative modalities of knowledge brokerage at the policy-science interface.

Project Funding

€1.5 million

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Dr Gerd Scholl

Project Coordinator

Economist, graduated in 1993, and began to work with IÖW the very same year. Started off with national and EU projects on product related environmental policies. Some focus on eco labelling and life cycle assessment. Later on comprehensive research into sustainable product service systems, such as sharing, renting, and leasing, in various projects. Innovative marketing strategies for such concepts was the topic of his dissertation that was finalised in 2008. More recently research interest in consumers' perceptions of new technologies (e.g. nanotechnology).

 **CORPUS**
The SCP Knowledge Hub

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