

Sustainable Consumption Institute

How do we align our personal desire for a better life, with a shared need for a better future?

Consumption is a hugely powerful force

The sustainability challenges we face stem largely from an explosion in consumption, and the corresponding exploitation of finite resources. To successfully respond to these challenges, we must now radically reduce the resource intensity of everyday lives.

This may mean consuming less, or it could mean consuming differently. Either approach requires big leaps in our understanding and our actions – not simply how we produce and distribute goods and services, but how we organise our societies, government policy, and our lives.

Our mission at the Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI) is to bring insight and clarity to a key part of the sustainability challenge: the role of consumption and how it needs to change.

We take original insights from the Social Sciences, insights that often challenge orthodox thinking, and subject them to critical empirical scrutiny. This, we believe, is essential for advancing fundamental understandings about processes of consumption and social change.

Our approach to research is one that develops novel methodologies for addressing key research questions, including the use of a wide range of data and comparative methodologies that recognise sustainable consumption is an international challenge.

Through an ambitious research programme we tackle head-on the scale and urgency of societal responses required to address sustainability – responses that require collaboration between a wide-range of stakeholders, including businesses and policy-makers, who can both benefit from and contribute to our research.

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Understanding consumption in contemporary societies is essential if we want to address the unsustainable way in which we currently provide in our needs.

Professor Frank Boons
Director, Sustainable Consumption Institute

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Esteem highlights

SCI research staff are invited members of four Research Council commissioning panels (including Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Centres and Large Grants) in the UK, Denmark, France, and Sweden. Professor Alan Warde has been elected 'Trustee of the British Sociological Association', and appointed Visiting Research Professor at Uppsala (Sweden, 2013-16) and Aalborg (Denmark, 2014-17) Universities.

Thomson Reuters selected Professor Frank Geels for the list of Highly Cited Researchers 2014 under the 'Business and Economics field'. Geels was identified in 'The World's Most Influential Scientific Minds 2014'; and was appointed to the 'Distinguished Scientist Fellowship Program', King Abdulaziz University (Saudi Arabia, 2013-16) and Visiting Research Professor at Stuttgart University (Germany, 2013-14).





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A focus on consumption

Consumers are not just purchasers of green products or the end of a production supply chain. They are enactors of ways of life, in which sustainability is usually only one consideration among many. Placing consumption in the foreground of research allows us to focus on understanding human needs, values, practices and habits so as to inform and strengthen action to achieve a transition to sustainable consumption.

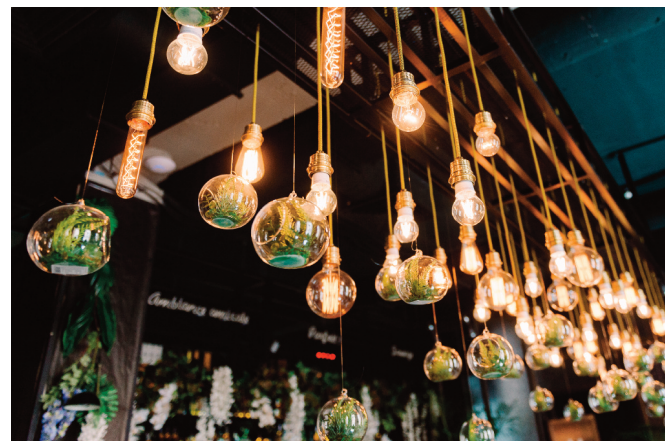
Linking consumption to production

Placing consumption in the foreground must not mean neglecting questions about the production, supply and distribution of goods and services. The challenge is to understand how consumers use products and services in the course of engaging in everyday practices. In particular it raises the question of how sustainable product and service innovations disrupt and are absorbed into everyday practices – and how understanding this process can in turn shape innovation.

“The current period of transformation provides unique opportunities to make changes towards more sustainable modes of provision.”

Professor Frank Boons
Director, Sustainable Consumption Institute

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Systems thinking

The radical and broad nature of the transitions required mean that systems innovation and the configuration of everyday practices form an important part of our approach. Addressing the sustainability challenge requires a focus on the relationships between everyday practices, technology, markets, industries, infrastructure, policy and regulation.

Advancing the evidence base

Much of the existing evidence base is focused on production-side metrics focusing largely on purchasing patterns and the attitudes underpinning consumer choices. Policy thinking is directed accordingly, marginalising theoretical insights on other processes of consumption. By developing new methodological techniques (including time diary and comparative analysis) the SCI seeks to make a distinctive contribution to the framing and content of the policy evidence base.

Working with stakeholders

Businesses, policy makers, NGOs, third sector organisations, community groups and other stakeholders have a significant role to play in provisioning sustainable consumption. They set the benchmark for the way that society and citizens adopt and transition towards sustainable practices. The SCI creates on-going conversations and projects with a range of stakeholders including Tesco, Unilever, Dunnhumby, WRAP, the Scottish Government and the Wellcome Trust.



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