



SCI Newsletter

Winter 2019

Comings and Goings

Matthew Paterson

Allow me to introduce myself, since I only became involved in SCI relatively recently. I joined as a Fellow in 2018 for a year, to work on a new project on global climate governance and politics, which has been the focus of most of my research for nearly thirty years. I then agreed to become the Institute's Research Director, starting in August 2019. It has been quite the learning curve and I look forward to learning much more as I work with SCI's great members and partners in the coming years.

Sadly for the Institute, the impetus for this was that Tally Katz-Gerro decided to leave the University and return to Israel. She provided important leadership over the last couple of years of SCI's life, and has developed collaborations with a number of SCI members, especially Sheryl MacGregor and Catherine Walker. We already miss her contributions, although she is continuing to collaborate with SCI members.

The last couple of months have been dominated by preparations for the Festival to be held on 5 December (see p.2) and, related, the finalisation of a new research agenda for the Institute. Tally started the work on the agenda and we have had extensive rounds of meetings and revisions, involving stakeholders from inside and outside the University, a group of academics outside Manchester whom we call our 'critical friends', as well as SCI's own members. Thank you to all who have been involved in this process which has helped clarify the focus of our research for the coming years. And we look forward to welcoming many of you at the Festival where we launch the agenda.

Normal life goes on outside the rather frenetic activity around the festival of course, as you can see in the various articles in the newsletter. Steffen Hirth and Malte Rödl successfully defended their PhDs (see p.5) so many congratulations to them. They continue to work

in the SCI on ongoing research projects. Welcome also to Martin Burgess who has joined us, working with Frank Boons and others on plastics within the RE3 project. However we are also sad to have said goodbye (hopefully only temporarily) to Julia Kasmire who has moved within the University to the Cathie Marsh Institute, developing new forms of methodological training, and soon to do so to Marc Hudson, who completed his PhD in the Institute and has been working on various projects with us during 2019.

Contact:
matthew.paterson@manchester.ac.uk

A festival of ideas to launch the SCI's research agenda



A festival of ideas at The University of Manchester's Sustainable Consumption Institute is set to lay down a marker for sustainability research in the next decade.

The event on 5 December 2019 will draw together findings from the Institute's research over the past 10 years, and launch their new agenda for the coming decade. The event will be open to policy makers, business leaders, researchers, and activists, as well as the general public.

It will feature guest speakers from all aspects of the sustainable consumption conversation. In addition to SCI academics, speakers include Corin Bell, the Founder and Director of the social enterprise Open Kitchen MCR which takes food that would otherwise go to waste and uses it to

cater at conferences and events. Corin is also the Lead for the Plastic Free Greater Manchester Campaign for Mayor Andy Burnham and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Also speaking are Nissa Shahid, an urban planner at the London-based Connected Places Catapult, and Martine Postma, a Dutch environmentalist and former journalist who pioneered the concept of Repair Cafés, where people come together to learn how to repair the objects they would otherwise throw away.

The event will take place in the new lecture theatre of the AMBS, and the programme offers several opportunities to discuss ideas as well as to network during a break and reception to follow. The reception is being catered by Open Kitchen MCR and attendees will have a chance to sample products from sustainable local businesses including Beer Nouveau, Stitched Up doing upcycled products, Sodada providing kombucha, as well as participate in a raffle for a bag of organic and locally-sourced vegetables from Veg Box People.

The event has been led by Dr Sherilyn MacGregor, Reader in Environmental Politics at

the Sustainable Consumption Institute, who pointed out that the research agenda is driven by the twin challenges of growing social inequalities and a rapidly worsening climate crisis. "There are significant socio-economic barriers to the uptake of sustainable practices, products and services, and our research aims to tackle these barriers head on, alongside issues such as urban transport, meat consumption, and plastics", she added.

Today, the SCI is a key contributor to The University of Manchester's aim to excel in research that combines the insight of different academic disciplines such as sociology, human geography and urban studies, business and management studies, environmental politics, social movement and innovation studies as a basis for research that illuminates the ways in which consumption practices play a key role in shaping societal responses to questions of sustainable development.

Contact:
sherilyn.macgregor@manchester.ac.uk
mariel.vilella@manchester.ac.uk

Investigating the sustainability-migration nexus through interdisciplinary, comparative cross-national research



Sherilyn MacGregor, Tally Katz-Gerro and Catherine Walker have been awarded £10k through the Melbourne-Manchester Research Fund to undertake a collaborative pump-priming project with Prof Lesley Head (Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor and Head of School of Geography) at the University of Melbourne.

The purpose of the project is to compare and consolidate research on Global South-to-Global North migration and environmental sustainability in the context of climate emergency and global inequalities. It will explore questions about how the everyday

environmental practices and knowledges of immigrants 'unsettle' dominant sustainability perspectives and how they might be positioned as a resource rather than a problem in Global North contexts.

The funding enables a residential visit by Prof Head and a post-graduate researcher. The project also aims to yield a funding bid for a major comparative, cross-national research project, two Manchester-based workshops, and a panel at the Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference in August 2020.

Contact:
sherilyn.macgregor@manchester.ac.uk

New Release - Handbook of Sustainable Innovation

Edited by Frank Boons and Andy McMeekin

The Handbook of Sustainable Innovation maps the multiple lineages of research and understanding that constitute academic work on how technological change relates to sustainable practices of production and consumption.

Leading academics contribute by mapping the general evolution of this academic field, our understanding of sustainable innovation at the firm, user, and systems level, the governance of sustainable innovation, and the methodological approaches used. The Handbook explores the distinctiveness of sustainable innovation and concludes with suggestions for generating future research avenues that exploit the current diversity of work while seeking increased systemic insight.





Re-imagining plastics

Against the backdrop of sustained public concern over the environmental consequences of plastics, it remains useful to engage in the thought experiment where we re-imagine a society in which there are no plastics. Apart from seemingly straightforward substitutions, such as replacing plastic shopping bags with paper ones, we would have to rethink our clothing (much of it is made of, or at least contains a percentage of, synthetic fibres), housing (gels used to seal bathrooms, window frames and doors), healthcare (syringes, gloves, operating kits, stents), mobility systems (cars bumpers, dashboards, train upholstery), not to mention the provision of food (given our increased reliance on delivery of food at home facilitated by digital platforms, the volume of packaging per food item runs the risk of increasing).

This is only a very short list of examples; continuing the thought experiment would bring into focus the full extent of the uses of plastics. This is partially due to the fact that plastics is not a single material; it is a label which refers to a wide range of materials produced from different feed stocks, which can take on substantially different properties by using additives and modifying production techniques. The use of the overarching label 'plastics' in the public (and policy) debate is in that sense misleading, as it ignores differences that are crucial in coming up with solutions.

That there is a challenge to be met is difficult to contest though. It is now common knowledge that of all modern plastics produced since the late 1950s, approximately 90% has ended up in natural ecologies; our use of these materials is predominantly linear, not circular. Although the negative consequences of the use of plastics have been debated among environmental scientists for over 45 years, the immediate advantages of using plastics, combined with the drive to find ever cheaper ways to provide for our needs, have led us to use the material without developing adequate ways of keeping it from ending up in our oceans, landfills, and (as micro or nano particles) in the air and our waterways.

Our thought experiment thus far is missing one important element: we are very much used to the functioning of current systems of provision, and thus any substitution faces the challenge of living up to current levels of functionality, convenience, and price. Thus, the seemingly simple substitution of a plastic carrier bag for a paper one turns out to involve a change in shopping practices: heavy and sharp items

require a rethink, and the re-uses of carrier bags that are part of many household practices are no longer possible. These are matters of convenience, one can argue. At least as important is that without plastics, many of our products would be more expensive, resulting in less access to them for lower income households. This implies that re-imagining a society that without plastics requires us to reflect on the consequences for social inequality as well.

This raises the bar for any solution developed to deal with the environmental challenges posed by the widespread use of plastics, and given the (global) implications for inequality, we are looking at the question of how plastics can be part of sustainable systems of provision for human needs.

RE3 - an interdisciplinary effort to develop systemic, no-regret solutions

The SCI is currently a key partner in a University-wide consortium to develop solutions for the plastics challenge. Funded by the EPSRC, researchers from materials science, manufacturing engineering, and social sciences have joined forces with a wide range of industrial and societal partners. The project aims to build a community which will be able to effectively produce research that meets academic standards as well as produces solutions to the plastics challenge. The project is special for several reasons. I will focus on the way in which we are collaborating across disciplines and sectors, as I feel this is what makes the project stand out from other current efforts. I also believe it is this type of 'deep' collaboration which is needed for meeting other societal challenges such as climate change.

As the introduction has made clear, the plastics challenge is definitely a question of material characteristics: the widespread usefulness of these materials is based in physical characteristics, which also make it a persistent element in natural ecologies. However, the challenge is also based in the everyday social practices of production and consumption, which have organised around these materials in a way that is difficult to unlock; and finally, technologies used for production and recycling shape the eventual environmental impact to a great extent as well.

Recognising this interrelatedness is nothing new: building a collaboration to work through it is. In our project a key decision was to take a period of 6 months to engage in a structured



process where academics from all disciplines, together with industrial and societal partners, engaged with the history of plastics applications to see what dynamics led them to be successful, and how they locked in to practices that later on led to problems. We did this for plastics used in food packaging, single-use medical devices, and clothing. This period of joint reflection, based on previous research done within SCI, was the starting point for formulating projects, where industrial and societal partners joined with researchers from at least two disciplines to propose a mini-project. These proposals were assessed on three criteria, one of which was actual interdisciplinarity. We selected 6 projects, and just to give a flavour of the type of work: one focuses on hospital practices and links this to new methods of regaining materials from used packaging and medical devices, another set of projects focuses on micro plastics, linking insight into household practices of laundry to experiments to filter micro-plastics. Another project looks into the social practices around waste collection as the basis for an innovative system for waste collection.

The six projects are complemented by a seventh one that continues the process of reflection and collaboration of the first six months. For each mini-project we organise workshops in which we seek to retain the focus on developing solutions which look at the whole socio-material system, and actively seek to identify possible negative unintended consequences in order to develop no-regret solutions.

It is very reassuring to see researchers and practitioners engaging in this process; apart from its immediate effect on the projects at hand, each project member will take this experience into new projects and activities, thus infusing them with an understanding of how interdisciplinary work can be done in a meaningful and effective way.

Contact: frank.boons@manchester.ac.uk



All Food is “Plant-Based” – Particularly Meat and Dairy

Steffen Hirth

Without a doubt, life forms on earth are in crisis. As revealed to the public by Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg’s Fridays for Future movement, our society exhibits a menacing lack of maturity in how ecological crises are practically addressed. In the context of food, avoiding climate breakdown and mitigating the sixth mass extinction in the history of the planet (Ceballos et al. 2015) requires swift action upon Livestock’s Long Shadow (FAO 2006). Therefore, academics, policy makers and businesses increasingly consider a shift towards so-called “plant-based” diets which principally require less land, energy, and other resources.

Why exactly is that so? Whilst meat’s, less so dairy’s, high environmental impact has received some public attention, rarely are the biophysical reasons for it made explicit. Essentially, in the production of all animal-sourced foods that involve the metabolism of an animal, energy is lost and emitted to the environment. Rather than electricity or fuels, energy here means the nutritional energy within the plants eaten by animals that in turn produce or become food. The feed conversion ratio puts the feed input in relation to the food output. Raising and slaughtering cattle for beef, for example, requires about 18kg of feed for 1kg of yielded meat; 4kg/1kg for pork; 2kg/1kg for chicken (de Ruiter et al. 2017). Based in the laws of thermodynamics, this poor energetic efficiency is to an extent improvable but ultimately inevitable whenever animate beings, who by moving and maintaining body heat use energy, grow the tissue that becomes food for another animate being. Thus, via an additional body, animal-sourced foods are an energetic detour in comparison to the energetic shortcut of

so-called “plant-based” diets in which humans eat plants directly.

The physical necessity of feed conversion losses not only means that meat and dairy too are based on plants (in the form of feed crops), but that base of plants is also much greater than what is required for direct human consumption of plants. Thus, by focussing only on the consumption end, the conventional use of the term “plant-based” falls short of conveying the plant-intensive (and thus energy- and land-intensive) materiality of animal-sourced foods. That term we use to describe our food, as much in academia as in everyday life, only scratches the surface of the materiality of production, and I contend that so does our mindfulness of why meat and dairy play a major role in mass extinction and climate breakdown.

Vegan Identity and Stockfree Agriculture

Another question arising from the popularity of the term “plant-based” is when and why it replaces the term “vegan”. Are people avoiding to call a spade a spade? Admittedly, as a concept, “plant-based” is perhaps a bit broader. Next to veganism, “plant-based” often comprises vegetarianism, which includes dairy or eggs, and flexitarianism, ie people who deliberately consume meat only occasionally and thus in comparatively small amounts. However, the relatively low environmental footprint of all of these diets is rooted in giving vegan foods a priority over animal-sourced foods. By relying purely on plants, veganism is simply the most consistent one. So why say “plant-based”, rather than “vegan”, when depicting, for example, a bean patty without any animal ingredients?

Despite its boom in terms of media attention, veganism is surely not (yet) a lifestyle everybody wants to self-identify or be identified with. From analysing social media, print and online news, or movies, social scientific studies have shown that vegans still face stigmatisation (eg Cole & Morgan 2011). Stereotyped as following a mere fad, being sentimental and extreme, it is understandable that people might avoid being put in that box. Well aware of that, businesses often choose the innocuous “plant-based” when they mean vegan food. On the one hand, this is wholly comprehensible and perhaps eases some meat lovers into something new. On the other, the avoidance of a clear identity highlights that, oddly enough, today’s food debates largely revolve around one thing (and little else): identity.

My concern here is that it may be precisely its confinement to an identity that limits veganism’s potential to help solving the climate breakdown and extinction crisis. Everything is centred on individuals’ dietary identities, ranging from “meat eaters” (carnists) to vegans. As a result, the transition towards a sustainable food system can only happen, or so it appears, with a focus on consumer identity and at the level of purchase. Turned into a question of consumer choice, the responsibility of businesses is merely to ease consumers into making environmentally sound decisions. What remains unaccounted for is the (ir)responsibility within producers offering both sustainable and unsustainable products in order to make that “choice” possible. Put differently, in confining heated public and political debates to consumer choice and identity, the material, spatial, and relational dimensions of food production are at risk of being neglected.



Veganism, as conventionally applied in food regulations and everyday life, is merely a label either for people or for vegetal products. Normally, we do not see production practices as part of veganism's definition. For example, a vegan person is "vegan" because they abjure from consuming animal products; a carrot is "vegan" per se because it is (the root of) a plant. This identity-based understanding of foods and diets discourages any questions about the food supply chain beyond "the consumer" or the end products they buy.

However, this is now challenged by a marginal but emerging agricultural and culinary paradigm: vegan organic production. While totally normal in both conventional and "conventional organic" agriculture, the use of manure, bone meal, or other animal derivatives for the replenishment of soil fertility is not allowed in this stockfree organic mode of production. Instead, soil fertility is supposed to be restored through composting and building humus soil, nutrient-fixing plants and mulching.

Looking at it from a sociological angle, this food practice challenges and redefines the very foundation of veganism – away from an exclusively identity- and consumer-based phenomenon towards a processual and also production-based one. Our carrot, for instance, is no longer "vegan" per se; it acquires this status by not being nourished by animal derivatives. What matters is the process of how that carrot came into being. What matters is whether or not a farmer performs vegan organic food practices.

Similarly, that focus on the wider process brings into mind that not only self-identified vegans are able to eat or produce "vegan" food. Rather, what I call vegan food practices is a performance that any of us can do, regardless of both our personal identities as vegans, vegetarians, or "meat eaters" (carnists) and our economic positions as consumers or producers. And it is precisely this undogmatic focus on performance where the political potential for a sustainable food transition lies.

The Absolute Ethical Minimum: A Safe Operating Space

No longer producing beef and dairy, Bradley Nook Farm is being reconfigured towards vegan organic crop cultivation. My own interview with the farmers revealed that, next to compassion with the farm animals, they based their decision on concerns about the human right to food, global biodiversity, water use, pollution through animal manure, and climate change. Despite these very much collectively oriented concerns, a report by BBC Countryfile claimed that 'the reasons for the change on this farm in Derbyshire are strictly personal'. Personalising the decision by tying it to the farmers' dietary identity as vegetarians, the programme refrains from addressing social-ecological incentives for a degrowth of animal agriculture. Thereby, it failed to convey the ways in which the farmers' decision is an issue of public, rather than just personal, concern.

Linguistic representations can reveal a lot about our understanding of material processes, the underlying social and ecological problems, and power relations. In this article, I try to convey the importance of extending the scope of "plant-based" and "vegan". Conventionally, these terms are largely confined to identities seen from the consumer side. By contrast, exploring materiality with a processual outlook provides new insights that prevent us from premature assumptions, for example, that vegetables have a fixed identity and are essentially "vegan". A compelling definition of "vegan" should take into account whether animal manure or bone meal are used to nourish food crops. Likewise, having a chunk of meat or cheese should not be mistaken as a plantless meal. In fact, animal products are more 'plant-based' due to feed conversion losses intrinsic to animal husbandry. The case of Bradley Nook Farm illustrates the necessity of acknowledging the food conversion gains from converting stockbased to stockfree agri- and culinary culture (eg gains of nutritional energy, land, biodiversity, safer climate, moral integrity).

Creating a safe operating space for all life on earth is the absolute minimum of food ethics. This requires putting aside dogmatic identity debates until the lurking existential threats of mass extinction and climate breakdown are dealt with. Not everybody currently wants to become a vegan, fair enough. Rather than striving for the individual purity that a vegan identity promises, the crises of our food system might better be overcome by commencing on material grounds rather than ideational heights. Yielding the conversion gain of enjoying relatively safe living conditions requires that vegan food practices will be performed predominantly, and not exclusively by self-identified "vegans", but by all producers and consumers. Precisely because feed crops for meat and dairy are still produced in excess, current agri- and culinary culture is too plant-based and not vegan enough to be sustainable.

Steffen Hirth completed a PhD in Sociology funded by the SCI in 2019, where he is currently a Research Associate. This article first appeared in Discover Society (issue 71, August 2019), in a special issue on "Feeding the Risk Society" edited by Richie Nimmo (Senior Lecturer in sociology, The University of Manchester) Available at: discoversociety.org/2019/08/07/

Contact:
steffen.hirth@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Congratulations!



Steffen Hirth

Steffen Hirth was awarded his PhD in June, following a successful viva examined by Peter Jackson (Prof of Geography, University of Sheffield) and Richie Nimmo (Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Manchester). Steffen's thesis, entitled "Food that Matters: Sustainability and the Material-Discursive Boundaries of Carnist and Vegan Food Practices", examined understandings of veganism, how boundaries between vegan and carnist food practices, particularly in response to animal agriculture as a sustainability challenge. Steffen, who had previously done research on the dairy industry in Germany, continues to work at the SCI as a Research Associate. His thesis was co-supervised by Dr Jo Mylan and Prof Alan Warde.



Malte Rödl

Congratulations to Dr Malte Rödl who successfully defended his thesis in July 2019. The thesis titled "Categorising Meat Alternatives: how dominant meat culture is reproduced and challenged through the making and eating of meat alternatives" was examined by Prof Mike Goodman (University of Reading) and Prof Alan Warde (SCI), and co-supervised by Prof Frank Boons and Dr Josephine Mylan. Malte's thesis analyses how manufacturers, advertisements, and eaters construct meaning and valuation of meat alternatives; he was specifically interested in how this relates to established understandings of meat as 'good food', and what this means for other ways of eating which are not based on flesh or its facsimiles. Besides writing two book chapters, Malte has contributed thoughts on recent developments relating to meat alternatives to The Conversation. We are pleased that Malte will be continuing his work with the SCI as a Research Associate focusing on interdisciplinary engagement in the EPSRC-funded RE3 project (see p.3).



The right to a healthy and sustainable environment:

Social cartography and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Catherine Walker

In November 2019, the world celebrates 30 years of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the most widely ratified agreement in the history of the United Nations. As part of the global celebrations, University College London (UCL) organised an intergenerational event to reflect on what has been achieved by the UNCRC and consider ongoing actions to protect children's rights. Young people from across the country submitted proposals for workshops drawing attention to their rights and what is necessary to ensure their protection.

This workshop was a perfect opportunity for the eco-club at Manchester Enterprise Academy (MEA) Central, who over the last year have been working with SCI Research Associate Catherine Walker, the Manchester Environmental Education Network and schools in Brazil on a social cartography project about the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, funded by the SCI Research and Internationalisation Fund. MEA Central students and students in Santarem and São Jose dos Campos (both in Brazil) have been mapping environmental hazards, risks and vulnerable groups in the community around their schools, and considering how climate change could aggravate these risks. The partnership with Brazil has been facilitated by Catherine Walker's contact with Rachel Trajber, Head of Education at the Brazilian National Centre for Monitoring and Early Warning of Disasters (CEMADEN), who was an SCI guest in March 2019.

Over the course of the social cartography project, the MEA Central students have been bolstered by the ever-growing youth climate movement and have been keen to share their map widely, meeting with other schools and local politicians to highlight their concerns about environmental risks and climate change. The students noted that youth activists including Greta Thunberg recently used the UNCRC as grounds for a complaint against the inaction of five governments on climate change.

At the UCL workshop on 7 November, MEA Central students, accompanied by Catherine Walker, Raichael Lock of the Manchester Environmental Education Network and their teacher, Mr Allon, used their map to draw links between their environmental concerns and the various articles of the UNCRC, drawing attention in particular to Article 6 (the right to life survival and development), Article 22 (the rights of refugee children), Article 24 (the right to health and health services), and Article 27 (the right to an adequate standard of living).

Workshop participants (from China and Cornwall) had the chance to try out social cartography for themselves, thinking with the students about what risks, hazards and vulnerable groups they encounter in their own communities, and what is necessary to avoid the worst effects of climate change. The students came away from the workshop more passionate than ever to protect their own and future generations' rights to a healthy and sustainable environment.

Contact:
catherine.walker@manchester.ac.uk



MEA Central students working on their map (Photo: Catherine Walker)



UCL workshop participants complete their own social cartography (Photo: Ben Allon)

Can we reduce water demand to 80 litres a day? And what can the government do to support it?

Dr Claire Hoolohan (Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research) and Dr Alison Browne (Sustainable Consumption Institute) reflect on their consultation submission to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on measures to reduce personal water use.

Today's building standards are insufficient to mitigate climate change or manage water scarcity. In order to comply with existing building regulations, a property's water use must not exceed 125 litres per person per day. In water stressed areas, local authorities can set a lower target, 110 litres per day. Defra are asking whether these targets could be more ambitious. We argue that they can, and propose Defra consider a target of 80 litres per day, with discretion to apply for a lower standard not to exceed 100 litres per day.

The government's role is to incentivise action to respond to challenges facing the UK. The Environment Agency has repeatedly shown there to be considerable pressure on water resources. Few regions have additional year-round capacity available and, unless demand is reduced, many will face significant water deficits by 2050. Despite existing building standards, reducing water demand proves difficult, signalling that deeper and more extensive action is required.

Additionally, existing targets were established in the context of the UK's Climate Change Act, which called for an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, but today the government strives towards net zero, in line with the Paris Agreement. This change in emphasis necessitates more ambitious action on climate change in every aspect of everyday life, including water, which is the UK's fourth most energy-intensive sector and a significant contributor to residential energy demand.

Research shows that building standards of 105 litres per day is both achievable and cost-effective in new-build homes. The target must be more stringent still if it is to encourage innovation, and the government must also consider how to reduce demand in existing buildings.

How do building standards relate to water use?

Ambitious water efficiency standards in buildings are commendable, however it is not buildings that use water but the people who live in them. There is a risk that in pursuing building standards, discussions regarding how water is used in homes are overlooked.

Presently, a micro-component approach is used to estimate water demand; calculating the number of appliances, flow rate and estimating the frequency and duration of their use based on averages. This does little to capture the range of actual water use associated with personal practices,

nor does it provide policy makers with the understanding needed to enable demand reduction.

While for many people showering once daily is normal, many people shower much more and much less frequently and there is great variation in the duration of a shower. This makes it difficult to estimate how much water will be used once a home is occupied, but more importantly tells us nothing about why people use water; whether people shower simply to get clean, or for other reasons such as caring for aching bodies or getting ready for the day ahead.

Without this understanding, it is difficult to disconnect water from the services it provides, and hard to imagine alternatives. Instead, policy and industry attention has become fixated on micro-components: taps, showers, washing machines and toilets. It is unsurprising that water efficiency labelling is prominent in Defra's consultation. Though labelling could valuably be used to regulate the manufacture and retail of appliances, relying on consumers to make water efficient choices is presumptuous and fails to acknowledge the wider social and infrastructural developments in which everyday demand is entrenched.

Ultimately, it is not only homes and appliances that need to change, but everyday routines and the wider infrastructural and social developments that sustain them. In order for government to enable these broader changes, there is a need for better methods to understand water demand, and a broader set of indicators to monitor change.

Changing routines

There are existing strategies that aim to reconfigure routines by engaging in the design and use of our homes, such as water-sensitive garden, kitchen and bathroom design.

Water-sensitive gardens, such as the RHS's Gardening for a Changing Climate, are those planted in a way that is attuned to the UK's seasonal weather patterns. They enable people to enjoy garden spaces without the water-intensive upkeep of a traditional lawn garden by incorporating other aspects such as social spaces and play spaces.

Water-sensitive kitchens and bathrooms go beyond efficiency to consider the material contents of these rooms and how they are used. In a water-sensitive bathroom, the shower might be replaced by a splash wash or a tilting bathtub, and the toilet fitted with a sink-to-cistern connection or an air-flushing unit.



A realistic government objective would be to support the normalisation and popularisation of these design practices by engaging with manufacturers, designers, home improvement retailers and the media.

There are other ways that the government might encourage a greater range of actors to participate in demand management to enhance the depth of change achieved and the speed at which change is seen. Engaging with the hair and beauty industry could enable the normalisation of dry-shampoos and waterless personal care regimes. Government could also incentivise employers to evaluate workplace dress codes to reduce the need for personal laundry, or establish workplace laundry programmes to benefit from efficient commercial washing machines, including new waterless machines.

These wider initiatives require diverse partnerships and close collaborative relationships; however given the possibility of such initiatives in achieving water efficiency at scale, they should be pursued. The government has an important role in incentivising these forms of collective action. By framing personal water usage in a more holistic way, the UK government can make a big splash in order to safeguard our future supply and demand for personal water.

Claire Hoolohan is a Presidential Research Fellow at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at The University of Manchester. She is a social scientist working with social practice theories in the field of sustainable production and consumption. Her research explores the social dimensions of global challenges such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, low-carbon food and water use.

Alison Browne is a Senior Lecturer in Human Geography and the Sustainable Consumption Institute at The University of Manchester. Alison works on the social, performative and material dynamics of everyday life related to water, energy, waste, and food. In a mixed methodological and transdisciplinary way she plays with ideas of how such everyday practices come to be disrupted, changed and governed in the context of climate and global environmental change.

This blog originally appeared on Manchester Policy Blogs.

Contact:

alison.browne@manchester.ac.uk
claire.hoolohan@manchester.ac.uk



Imagined Futures of Consumption: Lay Expectations and Speculations

Daniel Welch and Ulrike Ehgartner

Imagined futures of consumption have played a central role politically and economically since the end of the Second World War. This took the form of the promises of 'prosperity for all' and ever rising living standards, realised through mass consumption in the consumer society. Today, in the wake of the financial crisis, there has been a profound loss of faith in these central promises of consumer society. At the same time, climate change and the ecological crisis present an existential challenge to what Timothy Mitchell has called the horizon of limitless economic growth on which the twentieth-century democratic imaginary was founded (Carbon Democracy 2013).

There is of course a longer genealogy to the loss of faith in what Susan Buck-Morss has called the post-war "mass utopia", the belief "that the industrial reshaping of the world is capable of bringing about the good society by providing material happiness for the masses" (Dreamworld and Catastrophe 2002). But nevertheless, the relations between the loss of a hegemonic vision of future consumer society and our contemporary political moment demands consideration. If once shared visions of the future of consumer society no longer hold, how do people imagine the future of consumption?

Methodologically this question presents a challenge: how to elicit imaginative projections into the future? Essay writing has been used by a number of studies to elicit individuals' – usually young people's – imaginative engagement with the future, such as Ray Pahl's (1978) study of the expectations of school-leavers on the Isle of Sheppey. As part of a wider project – Imagined Futures of Consumption we collaborated with the Mass Observation Project (MOP), at the University of Sussex, on a 'Directive' (113: Autumn 2018) to the MOP's panel of volunteers on 'The Future of Consumption'.

MOP Directives enable researchers to present the panel of volunteers with a series of prompts and questions to which they provide open written responses. As Vanessa May puts it, Directives offer people "the space and time to think about and develop their thoughts on a topic that is rather abstract and therefore can be difficult to investigate through interviews" (May 2018). The volunteers are keenly aware of producing material

for a public historical archive and Directives elicit rich responses about expectations of everyday life, and how people imagine themselves embedded in historical context. We asked the volunteers "to imagine the future of the consumption of goods and services – for yourself, for younger generations and for society as a whole".

We received 121 responses. The volunteer panel is not demographically representative, with a disproportionate number of women and older respondents. Our sample is further skewed towards older people, with the median age of respondents in their 60s. Speculatively, older respondents may have been prompted to respond by questions posed in the Directive that used comparison to the past to elicit speculation on the future, such as: "Over the last 50 years our expectations of normal consumption have changed considerably – will expectations change as much again?". Indeed a number of respondents dwelt in detail on the changes in expectations within their own lifetimes.

In analysing the data we sought commonalities amongst, on the one hand, variations in future orientation, and on the other thematic content, to explore whether distinct imaginaries of future consumption could be identified. For the former we drew on the work of the cultural sociologist Anne Mische (2009, 2014), who has delineated distinct "dimensions of projectivity" through which we orient ourselves to the future. We found four of Mische's dimensions pertinent to our data, and adapted each of their definitions into a scale between 'high' and 'low'. "Expandability" marks the degree to which we imagine future possibilities opening up or contracting. "Volition", the sense of whether the future is moving towards us, beyond our control (low), or whether we make the future ourselves (high). "Connectivity" describes the degree to which an imagined logic of connection between present and future events is realised. Lastly, "sociality" marks the extent to which consideration of future actors, social relations and interactions is articulated, or the "principles of linkage...between actions and events", as Mische (2009) puts it.

Three distinct imaginaries were identified. The two dominant imaginaries were both framed by issues of climate change, resource scarcity and

environmental crisis. They shared the strong expectation that the future of consumption would look very different from today's resource-hungry consumerism. The prompts and questions of the Directive took pains to avoid any mention of climate change, the environment or sustainability. Notably, then, if the Directive cued these responses it was only so in the sense that the notion of 'consumption' conjoined with that of 'future' did so.

Inevitably, the current concerns of the public sphere will inform and frame people's understandings. At the time the volunteers were writing—between December 2018 and February 2019—David Attenborough's 'Blue Planet' series had shocked British audiences with the scale of plastic pollution in the ocean and urban air pollution had become a hot topic. But our volunteers were writing before Extinction Rebellion, Attenborough's "Climate change: The facts", and Greta Thunberg and the school strike movement rose to public consciousness.

We identify two distinct imagined futures of consumption that we call "Positive Constrained Consumption", expressing sentiments on a spectrum from guarded optimism to the utopian, and "Negative Constrained Consumption", spanning the dystopian to the apocalyptic. In the positive imaginary, climate change and ecological crisis could militate towards a better world of more frugal lifestyles based on values of care and simplicity. The overconsumption of current consumer society will simply not be possible, ameliorating the negative effects of consumerism. For most, this meant a return to more local and seasonal produce, reduced travel and a less throw-away society – a slower, calmer world of far more modest appetites and expectations of everyday consumption, which for our older respondents resembled that of their earlier years.

For our less optimistic respondents, planetary, demographic and economic pressures will lead to a future in which the comforts and conveniences of current consumer society are no longer possible. The imaginary of "Negative Constrained Consumption" envisages futures of limited access to resources and consumer goods, ranging from visions of material discomfort and economic inequality, to those of apocalyptic social and



Home economist Anne Anderson watches a radio controlled vacuum cleaner in the 'RCA-Whirlpool Miracle Kitchen of the Future' at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. Kodachrome by Bob Lerner for the Look magazine article "What the Russians Will See."

ecological collapse. This is a future world in which an ecologically imposed end to economic growth leads to a zero-sum game of survival.

Beyond thematic differences, the two "constrained consumption" imaginaries were distinct at the level of dimensions of projectivity. The positive imaginary was distinguished by high expandability and high volition. This imagined future was one of expanding possibilities – living the good life within ecological limits was considered a possibility; but those same limits offered the possibility of negative social outcomes too. A positive future could be made, realised by the volition of ideological or value-driven transformation. By contrast, the vision of "Negative Constrained Consumption" was one of constrained possibilities only. Here, overpowering forces over which we have no control make the future: rising sea levels, resource scarcity, mass migration, and natural disasters.

The third imaginary was a more familiar vision of technological progress. In this imagined future, automation, digitisation and other technological trends will lead to the reorganisation of work, leisure, infrastructures and society over all. For some this is a future of alienation and hyper-individualism. For others, a world of new forms of community and leisure. But unlike the imaginaries of constrained consumption these positive and negative appraisals were not aligned with distinctions in their dimensions of projectivity. They shared a low sense of *volition*. The future is understood here as coming towards us – a set of fairly immutable trends made by impersonal actors and powerful institutions.

The imagined future of technological progress also exhibited a high degree of *sociality* – through the sense in which these trends would radically re-organise everyday life. Perhaps surprisingly, this contrasted with both the positive and

negative futures of "constrained consumption". Both of the latter lacked a contextualisation of everyday social life in the future. For the positive vision of constrained consumption, there was overwhelmingly a sense of the future as a return to a past before the overconsumption of contemporary consumerism. While the positive vision evinced critical stances towards 'consumerism' and 'the throw-away culture', the dimension of *sociality* was generally limited to the collective outcomes of individual acquisition and utilisation of goods. The negative vision, ironically, had an additional focus on social inequality – as a trend towards a world divided between the billionaire elite and the immiserated rest – but there was little sense of dynamic social relations between these classes.

Both visions of constrained consumption were notable in having very limited articulation with ideas about technology, except negative appraisals of its consequences, such as plastic pollution. This is quite at odds with mainstream sustainable consumption or sustainable development discourse, in which technological solutions to environmental impacts are foregrounded. This perhaps underscores the extent to which sustainability discourse is generally an elite or professional discourse.

If nothing else, these lay imaginaries illustrate the degree to which ecological concerns have permeated popular understandings of the future. The nature of the volunteer panel cautions about over generalising. However, these popular imaginaries suggest ecological issues have far greater salience for political mobilisation than much mainstream politics acknowledges – and amongst not merely the school strikers but their grandparents too. But while we found a significant positive appraisal of a more frugal way of life, the negative vision of constrained consumption suggests how ecological constraints may play into a darker, zero-sum politics.

Daniel Welch is a Lecturer in Sociology/SCI and Principle Investigator on "Imagined Futures of Consumption" funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ES/R007942/1).

Ulrike Ehgartner is a Research Associate on the "Imagined Futures" project. Ulrike completed her PhD in Sociology funded by the SCI in 2019.

Contact:

daniel.welch@manchester.ac.uk

ulrike.ehgartner@manchester.ac.uk

The Sustainable Consumption Institute at ESA2019: Looking to the Future

From 20-23 August 2019, Manchester's Oxford Road resonated with the sound of numerous sociological conversations as over 3,000 European sociologists gathered for ESA2019, the biennial conference of the European Sociological Association. The Conference took place in venues across the campuses of University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and the Bridgewater Hall. Delegates enjoyed plenary talks by Michel Wieviorka (Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, France), Manuela Boatcă (University of Freiburg, Germany), Michèle Lamont (Harvard University, USA), Nasar Meer (University of Edinburgh, UK) and Sari Hanafi (American University of Beirut, Lebanon), which together provided much stimulating food for thought on the timely theme for the conference: Boundaries, Barriers and Belonging.

Staff, students and Fellows of the Sustainable Consumption Institute were involved in ESA2019 in an array of ways. SCI researchers Tally Katz-Gerro, Helen Holmes and Catherine Walker represented Manchester Sociology on the cross-university Local Organising Committee. In addition to feeding into the intellectual direction of the Conference, they undertook a range of tasks including: organising a local Universities' book stall; recruiting and supervising the 100 student volunteers; overseeing the design of Conference merchandise; and co-organising the LOC research stream and semi-plenary talk.

As ever, the Conference provided an unparalleled opportunity to share and discuss SCI research with colleagues from across the continent. SCI research was most heavily represented in sessions of the Research

Network on the Sociology of Consumption (RN05), one of ESA's largest research networks, in which SCI sociologists have played a prominent role. The diversity of the thematic sessions organised by RN05 at the Conference can be seen in the range of presentations delivered by SCI researchers. Prof Alan Warde presented with former SCI Research Associates Jessica Paddock and Jennifer Whillans on 'Unpacking omnivorousness: locating the British "foodie"', drawing on the major SCI-funded project on 'Eating Out' in the UK which Alan led. Alan also presented with former Manchester PhD Irmak Karademir Hazir (Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Oxford Brookes University) on 'Change in the Consumption of the Rich in the UK, 1967-2018', a study of the Financial Times' 'How to Spend It' supplement. Helen Holmes and Ulrike Ehgartner presented recently completed SCI-funded research on 'Exploring lost property and the materiality of

absence'. Luke Yates presented on work in collaboration with Daniel Welch on 'Social movements, everyday practices and political economic transformation'. Steffen Hirth presented his recently completed SCI-funded PhD research 'Food that matters: Exploring the material-discursive boundaries between animal-sourced and vegan food practices'. Elsewhere in the Research Network on Environment and Society, Catherine Walker, Tally Katz-Gerro and Sherilyn MacGregor presented on their SCI-funded research with Somali immigrants in Manchester, entitled 'Challenging Dominant Understandings of Sustainability: Continuities and Change in Migrants' Sustainability Practices'.

Two Research Streams – multiple sessions built around shared themes – were organised by SCI researchers. Both reflected the nascent focus on the subject of the future in contemporary Sociology. Catherine Walker co-organised the LOC research stream with Elisa Pieri (Sociology, University of Manchester): 'Urban Futures: Visions for Social Inclusion' (RS18). The idea behind this one-off stream was to explore the Conference theme of boundaries, barriers and belonging with reference to future visions of urban centres in Europe and beyond. Participants were invited to consider the role of the future and other temporalities in city visions, as well as the messages about social inclusion that such visions convey by foregrounding or marginalizing particular social groups. At a time when it has become common for city authorities to publish 'strategy' documents presenting a vision of the future city, this stream drew a very interesting range of presentations that considered the populations, places, infrastructures and heritages that are prioritised (or hidden from view) in envisioning diverse cities as Gothenburg, Helsinki, Aberdeen, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, Abuja, Barcelona, Rotterdam, London and our very own Manchester. A common theme across the presentations was that buildings and other infrastructures (and perhaps implicitly the practices they enable) become markers of the city's present or future sustainability in such heavily marketed visions, with much less attention given to people as enablers of sustainability. This resonated with earlier questions raised by Prof Michael Keith in his semi-plenary, also organised by Elisa Pieri and Catherine Walker. Discussing technologies such as defibrillators, smart watches and platform services, Prof Keith raised the question of whether technologies enable or constrain, whether they render people powerful or powerless to the development of the city taking place around them.

Daniel Welch co-organised 'Practicing the Future: Social, Material and Affective Futures' (RS10), the largest Research Stream at the Conference, with Prof Giuliana Mandich (University of Cagliari, Italy). Prof Mandich, whose work focuses on youth, everyday life and the future, is an advisor on Daniel Welch's 'Imagined Futures of Consumption' project (funded by the Economic and Social Research

Council, see p.7). Studies of futurity in Sociology are flourishing, with new contributions from diverse sub-fields.

The purpose of RS10 was to create a space for these diverse fields to engage with their shared concerns around the future as an analytical object. The research stream opened with contributions from former ESA president Prof Carmen Leccardi (University of Milano-Bicocca), who spoke on "Practicing The Future In A Time Of Crisis—Young People Facing Social Acceleration", and fellow youth studies luminary Prof Peter Kelly (RMIT University, Australia) who addressed "Young People and the Anthropocene: Futures Past and Present?". Former SCI Director Prof Dale Southerton (University of Bristol) presented on "Re-imagining Domestic Futures as Collective Temporal Rhythms: A Critical Analysis of Smart Home Technologies". SCI Research Associate Ulrike Ehgartner presented on her research with Daniel Welch on their "Imagined Futures of Consumption" project, reporting on their analysis of lay expectations of the future of consumption from the project's recent collaboration with the Mass Observation Project at the University of Sussex (see p.7). Further contributions came from fields as diverse as science and technology studies, sociology of medicine, cultural sociology, security studies, rural sociology and sustainability. The enthusiasm generated by the one-off Research Stream led to a proposal by co-organisers Daniel Welch and Giuliana Mandich, with former ESA president Carmen Leccardi, to launch a permanent Research Network in the European Sociological Association on the Sociology of the Future.

Lastly, the SCI's Alan Warde was elected onto the ESA Executive Committee. Alan has been instrumental in the growth and strength of the ESA's Research Network on the Sociology of Consumption (RN05) over many years, in which his work has been hugely influential. Next year will see RN05 convene for its Biennial Conference in Oslo, organised by the Consumption Research Institute Norway (SIFO, Oslo Met), which has also played an important role in the network over the years. SCI research will be well represented in Oslo and will continue to make a significant contribution to the sociology of consumption, of the environment and of social movements within the European Sociological Association.

Contact:

catherine.walker@manchester.ac.uk
daniel.welch@manchester.ac.uk



The opening plenary talk of ESA2019, held in The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester.

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SCI, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK

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